632
CC
318
Milne, A. A.
Three plays
137
JAN 10
JUN 21
Kirk
T 2
45309
361

632
CC
318
822-912
M659T
T 2

EAST CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

1. Any resident of East Cleveland complying with the library rules may borrow books from the Circulating Department.

2. **Fines.** This book is due on the date last marked on the date slip. If kept longer a fine of two cents a day will be charged. Careful usage of books is expected, and any injury or loss is to be paid for by the borrower. All fines for overdue or damaged books must be paid before the borrower may use his card.

3. **Renewals.** Books may be renewed once only for two weeks upon application at the desk or by mail or telephone, by giving card number, book number and date when due. 14 DAY AND 7 DAY BOOKS ARE NOT RENEWABLE.

4. **Reserves.** Books may be reserved by leaving a postal card request on file at the library.

5. Readers are invited to seek help at any time from the librarian and assistants.

DUE

Three Plays

The Dover Road
The Truth About Blayds
The Great Broxopp

By

A. A. Milne

EAST CLEVELAND
PUBLIC LIBRARY

632
CC
318

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1922

JUL 27 1935

THREE PLAYS **Alan A. Milne**

Three witty comedies. In *The Dover Road*, a well-meaning rich man intercepts runaway couples; *The Truth about Blayds* reveals the secret of a poet's reputation; *The Great Broxopp* is a farce on the theme of advertising.

Copyright, 1922, by
A. A. Milne

Made in the United States of America

MAIN LIBRARY

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE DOVER ROAD	1
THE TRUTH ABOUT BLAYDS	99
THE GREAT BROXOPP	191

48507

THE DOVER ROAD

An Absurd Comedy

FOREWORD

THOSE who, having previously seen "The Dover Road," are now going to read it will find that Anne does not, after all, marry Mr. Latimer. They may, perhaps, assume that this is how I originally wrote the play, and that I was persuaded, against my better judgment, into a so-called happy ending which left Anne with the sound of wedding-bells in her ears. I owe it to Mr. McClintic, who produced the play so delightfully, to explain that such was not the case. I wrote it originally as he produced it; but, even as I wrote, I felt that I did not want Anne married; I was so much in love with her. To rescue her from Leonard was easy; to save her from Nicholas was more difficult; and, in an unguarded moment, while I was triumphing over Nicholas, Mr. Latimer got her. Dominic and I were both a little disappointed, but we said nothing. I knew that I should have another chance later on. "Wait," I said to the smiling Mr. Latimer, "until we get to rehearsals. Marry you? Why, she doesn't even know your Christian name!" But I didn't think then that the first rehearsals would happen thousands of miles from Dover, and that I should not be there to save her. I expect Mr. Latimer knew. That is why he smiled. But of course once I got down to it, he

stood no chance. It is the printed word which remains, and here in print we have her saved. However, Mr. Latimer still smiles. He always knew in his heart that he was too old for her. In fact, sometimes I think that he and Anne only pretended in order to frighten Dominic.

A. A. M.

The Original Cast of "The Dover Road"

The first performance on any stage was at the Bijou Theatre, New York City, on Friday afternoon, December 23, 1921.

THE HOUSE

DOMINIC, *George Riddell*

THE STAFF, *Phyllis Carrington*
Ann Winslow
Edwin H. Morse
George Nolan

LATIMER, *Charles Cherry*

THE GUESTS

LEONARD, *Reginald Mason*

ANNE, *Winifred Lenihan*

EUSTASIA, *Molly Pearson*

NICHOLAS, *Lyonel Watts*

The Play was produced by Guthrie McClintic.

PEOPLE IN THE PLAY

THE HOUSE

DOMINIC
THE STAFF
MR. LATIMER

THE GUESTS

LEONARD
ANNE
EUSTASIA
NICHOLAS

The Scene is the reception room of Mr. Latimer's house, a little way off the Dover Road.

Act I. Evening.
Act II. Next morning.
Act III. *Scene I.* The same.
Scene II. Three days later.

ACT I

What Mr. Latimer prefers to call the reception room of his house is really the hall. You come straight into it through the heavy oak front door. But this door is so well built, so well protected by a thick purple curtain, and the room so well warmed by central heating, that none of the usual disadvantages of a hall on a November night, attaches to it. Just now, of course, all the curtains are drawn, so that the whole of this side of the hall is purple-hung. In the middle of the room, a little to the right is a mahogany table, cloth-less, laid for three. A beautiful blue bowl, filled with purple anemones, helps, with the silver and the old cut glass, to decorate it. Over the whole room there is something of an Arabian-night-adventure air; Dulac might have had a hand in the designing of it. In the day time, perhaps, it it an ordinary hall, furnished a trifle freakishly, but in the night time one wonders what is going to happen next.

Dominic, tall, stout and grave, the major-domo of the house, in a butler's old-fashioned evening dress, comes in. He stands looking at the room to see that all is as it should be, then walks to the table and gives a little touch to it here and there. He turns round and waits a moment. The Staff materialises suddenly—two footmen and two chambermaids. The men come from the left, the women from the right; over their clothes too Mr. Latimer has been a little freakish. They stand in a line.

Dominic: The blue room in the East wing is ready?

The Men: Yes, Mr. Dominic.

Dominic: The white room in the West wing is ready?

The Women: Yes, Mr. Dominic.

Dominic: (*Taking out his watch and looking at it.*) The procedure will be as before.

The Four: Yes, Mr. Dominic.

Dominic: See to it that I have no fault to find. That will do.

(*They go out. He looks at his watch again and then follows the men. He is hardly out of the room, when a bell rings. He returns slowly, draws the curtain from the front door and opens it. Leonard, in fur-coat and cap, is seen standing outside. He is a big well-made man of about* 35—*dark, with a little black tooth-brush moustache. When the door opens he gets his first sight of the interior of the room and is evidently taken by surprise.*)

Leonard: Oh—er—is this—er—an hotel? My chauffeur said—we've had an accident, been delayed on the way—he said that we could put up here—(*He turns round and calls.*) Here, Saunders! This can't be the place. (*To Dominic.*) Perhaps you could tell me——

Anne: (*From outside, invisible.*) Saunders has gone, Leonard.

Leonard: (*Turning round.*) Gone! What the devil—(*He plunges into the darkness.*)

Dominic: Saunders was perfectly correct, my lord. This *is* a sort of hotel.

Anne: (*Getting out of the car, but still invisible.*) He went off as soon as you got out of the car. Leonard, are you sure——?

(*She comes into the light; he is holding her arm. She is young, tall, pretty; cool and self-confident in the ordinary way, but a little upset by the happenings of the night.*)

Dominic: (*To Leonard.*) Saunders was perfectly correct, my lord. This *is* a sort of hotel.

Leonard: (*Puzzled and upset.*) What the devil's happened to him? (*He looks out into the darkness.*)

Dominic: Doubtless he has gone round to the garage to get the doors open. Won't your lordship——

Leonard: You can put us up? Just for tonight. My—er—wife and myself——

Dominic: If your lordship and her ladyship will come in—— (*He waits for them.*)

Leonard: (*To Anne.*) It's the best we can do, dear. I'm frightfully sorry about it, but, after all, what difference——

Anne: (*Giving him a look which means "Don't talk like this in front of hotel servants."*) I daresay it will be quite comfortable. It's only for one night. (*She comes in, followed by Leonard.*)

Dominic: Thank—you, my lady.

(*He shuts and bolts the doors: then draws the curtains. There is an air of finality about it. Anne looks back at the noise of the bolts going home, with something of a start. They are locked in now for good. Leonard, his eye on the supper-table, is saying to himself, "Dashed rummy sort of hotel."*)

Dominic: Allow me, my lady. (*He helps them off with their coats.*)

Leonard: You can give us something to eat?

Anne: I don't want anything, Leonard.

Leonard: Nonsense, dear.

Dominic: Supper will be served in five minutes, my lord.

Anne: (*Suddenly.*) Do you know who we are?

Dominic: I have not that pleasure, my lady.

Anne: Then why do you call me 'my lady'?

Leonard: (*Disliking a scene.*) My dear!

Anne: (*Waving back Leonard's protesting arm.*) No, Leonard. (*To Dominic.*) Well?

Dominic: His lordship mentioned that your ladyship was his wife.

Anne: Y—yes . . . Then you know *him* by sight?

Leonard: (*Complacently.*) Well, my dear, that need not surprise you.

Dominic: I know his lordship's rank, my lady. Not his lordship's name.

Leonard: (*Surprised.*) My rank? How the devil

Dominic: Supper will be served in five minutes, my lady. (*He bows and goes out.*)

(*There is silence for a little. They look at the table, at the room, at each other. Then Leonard says it aloud.*)

Leonard: Dashed rummy sort of hotel!

Anne: (*Coming closer and holding his arms.*) Leonard, I don't like it.

Leonard: Pooh! Nonsense, dear.

Anne: It almost seems as though they had expected us.

Leonard: (*Laughing.*) My dear child, how could they? In the ordinary way we should have been at Dover—why, almost at Calais by this time.

Anne: I know. (*In distress.*) Why aren't we?

Leonard: The car—Saunders, a fool of a chauffeur —a series of unfortunate accidents——

Anne: Do you often have these unfortunate accidents, Leonard?

Leonard: My dear Anne, you aren't suggesting that I've done this on purpose!

Anne: No, no. (*She leaves him and goes and sits down.*) But why tonight of all nights?

Leonard: Of course, it's damned annoying missing the boat, but we can get it tomorrow morning. We shall be in Paris tomorrow night.

Anne: Tomorrow night—but that makes such a difference. I hate every hour we spend together like this in England.

Leonard: Well, really, I don't see why——

Anne: You must take it that I do, Leonard. I told you from the first that it was run-away or nothing with me; there was going to be no intrigue, no lies and pretences and evasions. And somehow it seems less—less sordid, if we begin our new life together in a new country. (*With a little smile.*) Perhaps the French for what we are doing is not quite so crude as the English . . . Yes, I know it's absurd of me, but there it is.

Leonard: (*With a shrug.*) Oh, well! (*Taking out his case.*) Do you mind a cigarette?

Anne: (*Violently.*) Oh, why do men *always* want to smoke, even up to the moment when they're going to eat? Can't you breathe naturally for five minutes?

Leonard: (*Sulkily, putting his case back.*) I beg your pardon.

Anne: No, I beg yours.

Leonard: You're all to bits.

Anne: Nerves, I suppose.

Leonard: Nonsense! My Anne with nerves? (*Bitterly.*) Now if it had been Eustasia——

Anne: (*Coldly.*) Really, Leonard, I think we had better leave your wife out of the conversation.

Leonard: I beg your pardon.

Anne: (*To herself.*) Perhaps you're right. In a crisis we are all alike, we women.

Leonard: (*Going over to her.*) No, damn it, I won't have that. It's—it's blasphemy. Anne, my darling—(*She stands up and he takes her hands.*)

Anne: Oh! . . . I *am* different, aren't I?

Leonard: Darling!

Anne: I'm not a bit like—like anybody else, am I, not even when I'm cross?

Leonard: Darling!

Anne: And you do love me?

Leonard: Darling! (*He wants to kiss her, but she stops him.*)

Anne: No. Now you're going to smoke. (*She settles him in his chair, takes a cigarette from his case and puts it in his mouth.*) I'll light it for you. Matches? (*She holds out her hand for them.*)

Dominic: (*Who has a way of being there when wanted.*) Matches, my lady. (*He hands them to her. They are both rather confused.*)

Anne. Thank you.

Leonard: (*Annoyed.*) Thanks. (*He gets up, takes the matches from Anne, and lights his cigarette.*)

(*Dominic gives a professional touch to the table and goes out.*)

Damn that fellow.

Anne: (*Smiling.*) After all, darling, he thinks I'm your wife . . . Or don't wives light their husband's cigarettes?

Leonard: I believe you're right, Anne. There's something odd about this place.

Anne: So *you* feel it now?

Leonard: What did he mean by saying he knew my rank, but not my name?

Anne: (*Lightly.*) Perhaps he looked inside your cap—like Sherlock Holmes—and saw the embroidered coronet.

Leonard: How do you mean? There's nothing inside my cap.

Anne: No, darling. That was a joke.

Leonard: And the table laid. Only one table.

Anne: Yes, but it's for three. They didn't expect *us.*

Leonard: (*Relieved.*) So it is . . . It's probably a new idea in hotels—some new stunt of Harrods—or what's the fellow's name?—Lyons. A country-house hotel.

(*Dominic comes in.*)

By the way, Anne, what will you drink? (*To Dominic.*) Let me have the wine-list, will you?

Dominic: Bollinger 1906 has been ordered, my lord.

Leonard: Ordered?

Dominic: Mr. Latimer will be down in two minutes, my lady. He asks you to forgive him for not being here to receive you.

Leonard: Mr. Latimer? Who on earth's Mr. Latimer?

Dominic: If you would wish to be shown your room, my lady——

Anne: (*Who has not taken her eyes off him.*) No, thank you.

Leonard: (*Stepping forward.*) Look here, my man, is this an hotel or have we come to a private house by mistake?

Dominic: A sort of hotel, my lord. I assure your lordship there is no mistake. Thank you, my lady. (*He goes out.*)

Anne: (*Laughing half-hysterically as she sits down.*) Very original man, Harrod. Or is it Lyons?

Leonard: Look here, I'm going to get to the bottom of this. (*He starts after Dominic.*)

Anne: Why bother? Mr. Latimer will be here in two minutes.

Leonard: (*Turning back.*) Yes, but who the devil's Mr. Latimer?

Anne: (*With interest.*) Leonard, do you always arrange something fascinating like this when you elope? I think it's so romantic of you. But don't you think that the mere running away is enough just at first? Leaving the fogs and the frets of England, the weariness and the coldness of it, and escaping together to the warm blue sun-filled South—isn't that romantic enough? Why drag in a mysterious and impossible inn, a mysterious and impossible Mr. Latimer? You

should have kept them for afterwards; for the time when the poetry was wearing out, and we were beginning to get used to each other.

Leonard: My dear girl, what *are* you driving at? I say again—do you really think that I *arranged* all this?

Anne: (*With a shrug.*) Well, somebody did.

(*The two Footmen and the two Chambermaids come in and take up positions on each side of the table. They are followed by Dominic.*)

Dominic: Mr. Latimer!

(*Mr. Latimer comes in, Dominic and his Staff retire.*)

Latimer: Good evening!

(*He bows with an air. A middle-aged gentleman, dressed rather fantastically as regards his tie and his dinner-jacket and the flower in his buttonhole.*)

Leonard: Good evening. Er——

Latimer: You will forgive me for being announced in my own house, but I find that it saves so much trouble. If I had just come in and said, 'I am Mr. Latimer,' then *you* would have had to say, 'And I am —er—So-and-So, and this is—er—' Exactly. I mean we can get on so much better without names. But of course——

Leonard: You will excuse me, sir, but——

Latimer: (*Going happily on.*) But of course, as you were just going to say, we must call each other *something.* (*Thoughtfully.*) I think I shall call you Leonard. There is something about you—forgive the liberty—something Leonardish. (*With a very sweet smile to Anne.*) I am sure you agree with me.

Anne: I am wondering whether this is really happening, or whether I am dreaming it.

Latimer: (*His back to Leonard.*) And Leonard isn't wondering at all; he is just tapping his forehead with a great deal of expression.

(*Leonard, who was doing this, stops in some confusion.*)

Leonard: (*Coldly.*) I think we have had enough of this, Mr. Latimer. I was giving you the benefit of the doubt. If you are not mad, then I will ask you for some other explanation of all this nonsense.

Latimer: (*Sniffing at the flower in his buttonhole.*) An impetuous character, Leonard. It must be so obvious to everybody else in the room that an explanation will be forthcoming. But why not a friendly explanation following a friendly supper?

Anne: Are we your guests?

Latimer: Please.

Anne: Thank you.

Latimer: But there is still this question of names. Now we agreed about Leonard——

Anne: (*Looking at him fearlessly.*) My name is Anne.

Latimer: Thank you, Miss Anne.

Leonard: (*Awkwardly.*) Er—my wife.

Latimer: Then I am tempted to leave out the "Miss."

Leonard: (*Annoyed again.*) Look here——

Latimer: (*Turning to him.*) But there is something to look at, if I do, Leonard.

(*The Staff comes in.*)

Ah, supper. Will you sit here, Anne? (*He goes to the head of the table, and indicates the chair on the right of him.*) And you here, Leonard? (*The chair on the left.*) That's right.

(*They all sit down.*

Dominic and the Staff serve the supper. Five of them, so things go quickly.)

Latimer: "A little fish, a bird, a little sweet. Enough to drink, but not too much to eat." I composed that in my bath this morning. The wine has been waiting for you since 1906.

(*They are all served with fish, and the wine has been poured out.*)

Dominic, dismiss the Staff. We would be alone.

(*They are alone. He rises, glass in hand.*)

My friends, I will give you a toast. (*He raises his glass.*) A Happy Ending!

Anne: (*Lifting her glass.*) A Happy Ending.

Latimer: You don't drink, Leonard. You would have the adventure end unhappily, as is the way of the modern novel?

Leonard: I don't understand the beginning of it, Mr. Latimer. I don't—you will forgive me for saying so—I don't see how *you* came into it. Who *are* you?

Anne: Our host, Leonard.

Leonard: So it seems, my dear. But in that case, how did we come here? My chauffeur told us that this was an hotel—your man assured me, when I asked, that it was an hotel, a sort of hotel. And now it seems that we are in a private house. Moreover, we seem to have been expected. And then again—if you will forgive me—it appears to be an unusual kind of house. I tell you frankly that I don't understand it.

Latimer: I see your difficulty, Leonard.

Leonard: (*Stiffly.*) Nor am I accustomed to being called Leonard by a perfect stranger.

Latimer: What you are saying for yourself is, "Who is this man Latimer? Is he *known?* Is he in the Stud Book?—I mean Debrett. Is he perhaps one of the Hammersmith Latimers, or does he belong to the Ealing Branch?"

Anne: (*Eating—calmly.*) What does it matter?

Latimer: Yes, but then *you* like the fish. Leonard doesn't.

Leonard: I have no fault to find with the fish. You have an excellent cook.

Latimer: (*Gravely bowing.*) I beg your pardon, I thank you.

(*Dominic comes in.*)

His lordship likes the fish.

Dominic: Thank you, sir. I will inform the cook. (*He goes out.*)

Anne: When you are giving us your tiresome explanations after supper, Mr. Latimer, I wish you would just add one more to them.

Latimer: But of course.

Anne: Your Mr. Dominic's appearances are so apt. How is it done?

Latimer: (*Pulling down his cuff.*) Yes, I'll make a note of that. (*He writes on it.*) Dominic,—Apt appearance of.

(*Dominic re-appears.*)

Latimer: Admit the bird, Dominic.

(*Dominic goes out.*)

Leonard: (*Rising stiffly.*) I'm afraid we shall have to be getting on now, Mr. Latimer . . . Anne, dear

. . . We are much obliged for your hospitality, but —er—I imagine we are not far from Dover——

Latimer: On the Dover Road, certainly.

Leonard: Exactly. So if you would—er—have instructions given to my chauffeur—er—(*He hesitates as the Staff comes in.*)

Latimer: Dominic, his lordship's glass is empty. He wishes to drink my health.

Dominic: I beg your pardon, my lord. (*The glass is filled.*)

Latimer: And while he is up, just find his lordship a more comfortable chair. He has been a little uneasy on that one all through the fish.

Dominic: (*Removing the chair.*) I beg your pardon, my lord.

(*A Servant approaches with another one.*)

Latimer: (*Rising with his glass and drinking to Leonard.*) Prosit! (*He sits down, and Leonard mechanically sits down too.*) Now for the bird. (*To Anne.*) I like these little ceremonies in between the courses. Don't you?

Anne: I'm liking my supper.

Latimer: I am so glad. (*As Anne is helped.*) I shot this bird myself. (*He looks at it through his glass.*) What is it, Dominic?

Dominic: *Poulet en casserole* with mushrooms, sir.

Latimer: *Poulet en casserole* with mushrooms. I shot the mushrooms . . . A large help for his lordship, Dominic. (*To Leonard.*) Let me introduce your chicken to you, Leonard. One of the Buff-Orpingtons. I daresay you know the family. His mother was a Wyandotte. He was just about to con-

tract an alliance with one of the Rock girls, the Plymouth Rocks, when the accident happened.

(*They are alone again now, plates and glasses well filled. Leonard, who has been waiting impatiently for the Staff to go, pushes back his chair and gets up.*)

Latimer: Dear me! Not a third chair, surely?

Leonard: Now look here, Mr. Latimer, this farce has gone on long enough. I do not propose to sit through a whole meal without some further explanation. Either we have that explanation now, or else—Anne, dear—or else we'll be getting on our way.

Latimer: (*Thoughtfully.*) Ah, but which is your way?

Leonard: Dover. My chauffeur seems to have got off the track a little, but if you can put us on to the Dover Road——

Latimer: (*To himself.*) The Dover Road! The Dover Road! A dangerous road, my friends. And you're travelling in the dark.

Leonard: Really, Mr. Latimer, that needn't frighten us.

Anne: (*Putting her hand on his arm.*) What do you mean?

Latimer: A strange road, Anne, for *you.* A new untravelled road.

Leonard: Nonsense. She's often been this way before. Haven't you, dear?

Anne: (*Shaking her head.*) No . . . But I'm not frightened, Mr. Latimer.

(*There is silence for a little. Then Dominic appears noiselessly.*)

Latimer: Dominic, supper is over. His lordship loved the chicken—too well to eat it. He adored the mushrooms—in silence. Inform the cook.

Dominic: Yes, sir.

Latimer: (*Offering his case to Anne*) A cigarette?

Anne: No, thank you.

Latimer: You permit it?

Anne: Of course.

Latimer: Thank you.

Dominic: (*To Leonard.*) Cigar, my lord?

Leonard: Er—thanks.

Latimer: Well, shall we——?

(*They get up, and move into more comfortable chairs, Latimer talking.*)

Latimer: Which chair would you like, Anne? There? (*She sits down.*) That's right. Now then, Leonard, we want something especially comfortable for you. You are a little finicky about chairs if you don't mind my saying so . . . What about *that* one? Just try it and see how you like it.

(*Leonard tries it, and sinks into it up to the neck.*)

Yes, I think you will be happy there. And I shall sit here. Now everything is ready.

(*They are alone again.*)

Leonard: (*With as much dignity as is possible from that sort of chair.*) I am waiting, Mr. Latimer.

Latimer: I am waiting, Leonard, for your questions.

Anne. Let me begin with one. (*He turns to her.*) Your table was laid for three. For whom were the other two places intended?

Latimer: For yourself and Leonard.

Anne: You expected us?

Latimer: Yes.

Anne: How did you know we were coming?

Latimer: Saunders had his instructions to bring you.

Leonard: (*Starting up from his chair—or trying to.*) Saunders! My chauffeur! Do you mean to say——

Latimer: Let me help you up, Leonard. You have the wrong chair again. It is difficult to be properly indignant in that one. (*He helps him into a sitting position.*) That's better. You were saying——

Leonard: You mean to tell me that you had the audacity to bribe my chauffeur?

Latimer: No, no, Leonard. What I mean is that *you* had the foolhardiness to bribe my friend Saunders to be your chauffeur.

Leonard: Upon my word——

Anne: Who is Saunders?

Latimer: Saunders? He's Joseph's brother. Joseph was the gentleman in orange. I don't know if you noticed him. He helped you to fish.

Leonard: (*Out of the chair at last.*) How dare you interfere in my concerns in this way, sir!

Anne: Before you explain how you dare, Mr. Latimen, I should like to know *why* you are so interested in us. Who are you?

Latimer: No more than Mr. Latimer. It is a purely impersonal interest which I take—and I take it just because you are going the Dover Road, my dear, and it is a dangerous road for a young girl to travel.

Anne: (*Very cool, very proud.*) I don't think I asked you to be interested in me.

Latimer: Nobody does, my dear. But I am. Very interested. In all my fellow travellers. It is my hobby.

Leonard: Anne! (*He means, "Let's get out of this." He makes a movement to the front door.*)

Latimer: The door is locked, Leonard.

Leonard: (*Bending over him and putting his face very close to Latimer's.*) Ah! Then I will give you one minute in which to open it.

(*Dominic has come in.*)

Latimer: Dominic, his lordship's face is just a little too close to mine. Could you—thank you.

(*Leonard has started back on noticing Dominic.*)

Coffee? Excellent.

(*The Footmen come round with coffee.*)

Anne: No, thank you.

Leonard: No, thanks. (*He sits on another chair.*)

Latimer: No, thank you. By the way, Dominic, did you go round to the Hospital this afternoon?

Dominic: Yes, sir. The young gentleman is getting on nicely. He was able to take a little bread-and-milk this morning.

Latimer: Ah, I'm glad. Nothing solid yet?

Dominic: No, sir. The jaw is still very tender. (*He goes out.*)

Latimer: (*To Leonard.*) He bumped it against my knuckles last week. An impetuous young fellow. He was running away with—dear me, I forget her name—I always forget names. I think he called her Pussy. She had several children. (*Unconsciously he has shot his cuff, and sees suddenly the note he has made.*) What's this? "Dominic. Apt appearance of." Ah, yes. (*He turns to Anne.*) It's very simple. A little fad of mine. There are bells everywhere in this room;

in every chair, on the table, in the floor, wherever I am, I can press a bell for Dominic. He is always close at hand on reception-evenings. Yes.

Anne: That was a little display of force which you were giving us just now?

Latimer: (*Apologetically.*) Yes. I thought it better. Leonard is so impetuous. Joseph and Jacob were both amateur champions in their day. Dominic is a very heavy fall-er. He never has to fall on a man twice. If all this is quite understood at the beginning, it makes it so much easier.

Anne: (*Getting up.*) Mr. Latimer, I assure you that this is not a sudden freak of fancy, and that I know my own mind. I ask you, as a gentleman, to open the door.

Latimer: (*Shaking his head.*) I am afraid it is impossible, Anne.

(*She shrugs her shoulders and sits down.*)

Leonard: (*Calm for the moment.*) So we are kept here by force?

Latimer: Need we insist upon it? Let us rather say that you have postponed your visit to France in order to spend a few days with a friend.

Leonard: I prefer to say force.

Latimer: (*With a bow.*) I do not dictate your words to you. Your movements for the moment, yes. So let us say "force."

Leonard: We are prisoners in fact?

Latimer: Within the limits of my house.

Leonard: And if my—my wife chooses to walk out of your front door tomorrow morning, your—your fellow-conspirators would lay hands on her and stop her?

Latimer: My dear Leonard, why should your—your wife want to walk out of the front door tomorrow? What would she want to do in the garden in November? Do be reasonable.

Leonard: Suppose she wished to walk to the nearest police-station?

Latimer: (*To Anne.*) Do you?

Anne: (*With a smile.*) Could I?

Latimer: If you stood on Leonard's shoulders you might just reach the top of the wall. . . . Dominic tells me that they have lost the key of the gates. Very careless of them.

Leonard: Well, I'm—It's monstrous!

Anne: Yes, but we can't keep on saying that. Here we are apparently, and here we have to stay. But I still want to know very much *why* Mr. Latimer has this great desire for our company.

Leonard: You have the advantage of me now, sir, but you will not always have it. The time will come when I shall demand satisfaction for this insult.

Latimer: (*With an air—rising and bowing.*) My lord! Letters addressed to me at the Charing Cross Post Office will always be forwarded.

Leonard: (*Slightly upset.*) This gross insult to myself and—er—my wife.

Latimer: No, no, not your wife.

Leonard: How dare you!

Latimer: (*In alarm.*) Surely I haven't made a mistake. (*To Anne.*) You and he are running away together, aren't you?

Leonard: (*A step nearer.*) Look here, sir——

Anne: Oh, Leonard, what's the good? We aren't ashamed of it, are we? Yes, Mr. Latimer, we are running away together.

Latimer: Of course! Why not? Leonard, *you* aren't ashamed of it, are you?

Leonard: I object to this interference in my private affairs by a——

Latimer: Yes, yes, but you've said all that. It's interfering of me, damnably interfering. But I am doing it because I want you both to be happy.

Leonard: I can look after my own happiness.

Latimer: *And* this lady's?

Leonard: She is good enough to believe it.

Anne: I am not a child. Do you think I haven't thought? The scandal, the good name I am going to lose, the position of that other woman, I have thought of all these things.

Latimer: There is one thing of which you haven't thought, Anne.

Anne: I am afraid you are old-fashioned. You are going to talk to me of morality.

Latimer: (*Smiling.*) Oh, no, I wasn't.

Anne: (*Not heeding him.*) Living alone here, a bachelor, within these high walls which keep the world out, you believe what the fairy-books tell us, that once two people are married they live happy ever after.

Latimer: Oh, no, I don't.

Anne: I am the wicked woman, coming between the happy husband and wife, breaking up the happy home. Is that it, Mr. Latimer?

Leonard: Rubbish! The happy home! Why, this is my first real chance of happiness.

Latimer: His first real chance of happiness! As he said when he proposed to Eustasia.

Leonard: (*Upset.*) What's that?

Latimer: (*To Anne.*) May I ask *you* some questions now?

Anne: Yes?

Latimer: Eustasia will divorce him?

Leonard: We shall not defend the suit.

Latimer: And then you will marry Anne?

Leonard: Another insult. I shall not forget it.

Latimer: I beg your pardon. I simply wanted an answer.

Anne: He will marry me.

Latimer: I see. And then, as the fairy-books tell us, you will live happy ever after?

(*Anne is silent.*)

Leonard: I need hardly say that I shall do my best to——

Latimer: (*To Anne.*) And then, as the fairy-books tell us, you will live happy ever after?

(*Anne is silent.*)

I live within my high walls which keep the world out; I am old-fashioned, Anne. You are modern, you know the world. You don't believe the fairy-books, and yet—you are going to live happy ever after?

Leonard: I don't see what you're driving at.

Latimer: Anne does.

Anne: (*Raising her eyes to his.*) I take the risk, Mr. Latimer.

Latimer: But a big risk . . . Oh, believe me I am not so much out of the world as you think. Should I have known all about you, should I have brought you here, if I were? I know the world; I know the risks of marriage. Marriage is an art—well, it's a profession in itself. (*Sharply.*) And what are you doing?

Marrying a man whose only qualification for the profession is that he has tried it once, and made a damned hash of it.

Leonard: Well, really, sir!

Latimer: Isn't it true?

Leonard: Well—er—I admit my marriage has not been a happy one, but I venture to say—well, I don't wish to say anything against Eustasia——

Latimer: Go on. Life is too short for us to be gentlemen all the time.

Leonard: (*Explosively.*) Well then, I say that not even St. Michael and all his angels could have made a success of it. I mean, not even St. Michael.

Latimer: Yet you chose her.

Leonard: Er—well— (*But he has nothing to say.*)

Latimer: (*After a pause.*) Miss Anne, I am not being moral. You see, I am a very rich man, and we know on good authority that it is difficult for a very rich man to be a very good man. But being a very rich man I try to spend my money so that it makes somebody else happy besides myself. It's the only happy way of spending money, isn't it? And it's my hobby to prevent people—to try if I can prevent people—making unhappy marriages . . . It's wonderful what power money gives you. Nobody realises it, because nobody ever spends it save in the obvious ways . . . You may say that I should have prevented Leonard from marrying Eustasia in the first place. I have done that sometimes. I have asked two young people here—oh, properly chaperoned—and guests, not prisoners as you are—two young people who thought that they were in love, and I have tried to show each to the other in the most unromantic light. I have let the girl see her lover when he was angry, when he was sulky, when he had

lost his sense of humour. I have shown the girl to the man when she had forgotten her dignity, when she was greedy, ill-tempered . . . Sometimes the engagement has been broken off. Sometimes they have married and—lived happy ever after . . . . . But mostly it is my hobby to concentrate on those second marriages into which people plunge—with no parents now to restrain them—so much more hastily even than they plunge into their first adventure. Yet how much more carefully they should be considered, seeing that one at least of the parties has already proved his utter ignorance of the art of marriage . . . And so, my dear friends, when I hear—and a rich man has many means of hearing—when I hear that two people are taking the Dover Road, as you were taking it tonight, I venture to stop them, and say, in the words of the fairy-book, "Are you *sure* you are going to live happy ever after?"

Leonard: Your intentions may be good, but I can only repeat that your interference is utterly unwarranted, and you are entirely mistaken as to the power and authority which your money gives you.

Latimer: Authority, none. But power? (*He laughs.*) Why my dear Leonard, if I offered you a hundred thousand pounds to go back to your wife tonight this lady would never see you again.

Leonard: Well, of all the damnable things to say——

Latimer: How damnable the truth is! Think it over tonight, Leonard. You are a poor man for your position—think of all the things you could do with a hundred thousand pounds. Turn it over in your mind—and then over and over again. A hundred thousand pounds.

(*For a moment it seems as if Leonard is beginning to turn it, but Anne interrupts.*)

Anne: (*Scornfully.*) Is this part of the treatment? Am I being shown my lover when he is mercenary?

Latimer: (*With a laugh.*) Oh no! If that were part of my treatment, there would be no marriages at all. Oh no, it isn't a genuine offer. (*To Leonard.*) It's off, Leonard. You needn't think it out any more.

(*Leonard wakes up suddenly, a poor man.*)

Besides, you misunderstand me. I don't want to separate you by force—I have no right to.

Anne: But how modest suddenly!

Latimer: (*With a bow and a smile.*) Madam, I admire your spirit.

Anne: Leonard, I am receiving the attentions of another man. Beware of jealousy . . . All part of the treatment, Mr. Latimer?

Latimer: You're splendid. (*Seriously.*) But I meant what I said just now. I am not preventing you from going the Dover Road, I am only asking you to wait a few days and see how you get on. It may be that you two are the perfect soul-mates; that your union has already been decreed in Heaven and will be watched over by the angels. If so, nobody will rejoice in your happiness more than I. I shall not say, "You have no right to be happy together. Leonard must remain with his lawfully-wedded Eustasia." Believe me, I do not waste my money, my time, my breath in upholding the sanctity of an unhappy marriage. I was brought up in the sanctity of an unhappy marriage; even as a child I knew all about it. (*Less seriously.*) But oh, my dear Anne, let us have a little common-sense before we adventure marriage with a man who is always making a mess of it. We know what Leonard is—how perfectly hopeless as a husband.

Anne: I don't think that is quite fair.

Latimer: Well as far as we can tell, you've never made a happy marriage yet, have you, Leonard?

Leonard: (*Sulkily.*) I don't want to say anything against Eustasia——

Latimer: Good God, man, aren't you shouting it all the time? Why else are you here? But don't try to pretend that it's all Eustasia's fault.

Leonard: (*Doubtfully.*) Well——

Latimer: Or that it will be all Anne's fault *next* year.

Leonard: What do you mean, next year?

Latimer: I beg your pardon. I should have said the year after next.

(*There is a little silence.*)

Anne: (*Getting up.*) I think I will go to bed. How long do you want us to wait?

Latimer: Can you spare a week? You with so many years in front of you.

Anne: I have a father. I left him a note to say what I was doing. We don't see much of each other, but I thought it polite. Does that interfere with your plans at all?

Latimer: (*Smiling.*) Not at all. There was a little mistake about the delivery of that note. Your father is under the impression that you are staying with friends—in Kent . . . A great power, money.

Anne: I congratulate you on the perfection of your methods. Good-night.

(*Dominic is in the room.*)

Latimer: Her ladyship will retire.

Dominic: Yes, sir. (*He goes out.*)

Latimer: Good-night, Miss Anne.

Anne: (*Holding out her hand suddenly.*) Without prejudice.

Latimer: (*Bending over it gallantly.*) Ah, but you are prejudicing me entirely.

(*A maid comes in.*)

Maid: This way, my lady.

(*She leads the way to a door on the right, and Anne follows her.*)

Latimer: (*Pleasantly, to Leonard.*) And did *you* leave a note for *your* father, Leonard?

Leonard: You ought to know. You appear to have your conspirators everywhere. Saunders—and I suppose Anne's maid—and God knows who else.

Latimer: Money, Leonard, money. A pity you refused that hundred thousand pounds. You could have bribed the Archbishop of Canterbury to curse me . . . Well, a week here won't do either of you any harm. Have a whiskey and soda?

Leonard: I am not at all sure that I ought to drink in your house.

Latimer: You will be thirsty before you go.

Leonard: (*Hesitating.*) Well——

(*A Footman appears with the whiskey.*)

Latimer: That's right. Help yourself, won't you?

Leonard: (*Helping himself.*) Please understand that I do this, as I do everything else in your house, under protest.

Latimer: (*Shooting his cuff and taking out his pencil.*) Your protest is noted.

Leonard: (*Returning to the too comfortable chair.*) As I have already said, your conduct is perfectly outrageous. (*He sinks into its depths.*)

Latimer: And as I have already said, you can't do moral indignation from that chair. Remember what happened to you last time.

Leonard: Perfectly outrageous. (*He drinks.*)

Latimer: Have another cigar?

Leonard: I shall go to bed as soon as I have drunk this. (*He drinks.*)

Latimer: You wouldn't care for a game of billiards first?

Leonard: I am not in the mood for billiards.

Latimer: By the way, we have another runaway couple here. But their week of probation is just over. They expect to leave tomorrow.

Leonard: I am not interested in your earlier crimes.

Latimer: I think you would be interested in *this* couple, Leonard.

Leonard: I assure you I am not.

Latimer: Ah! (*Picking up a review and settling himself.*) Very good article this month by Sidney Webb. You ought to read it.

Leonard: I am not interested in Sidney Webb.

Latimer: Breakfast is at ten o'clock. In here.

Leonard: (*Struggling out of his chair.*) I shall eat it under protest.

Latimer: You're off? Then I'll say good-night.

(*The two Footmen, Joseph and Jacob, have come in.*)

Leonard: (*Stiffly.*) Good-night.

(*He walks up to the door on the right. Jacob is in front of it. Leonard is pulled up at sight of him. Joseph indicates the door on the left.*)

Joseph: *This* way, my lord.

Leonard: (*Looking from one to the other.*) Er—er—thank you.

(*He goes out.*
Mr. Latimer is alone with Sidney Webb.)

ACT II.

It is next morning. Eustasia, Leonard's wife, (who should be sitting patiently at home wondering when he will return) is having breakfast with a long-legged attractive young man called Nicholas. She is what people who talk like that call a "nice little thing" near enough to thirty to begin to wish it were twenty. At present she is making a good deal of fuss over this dear boy Nicholas. Breakfast is practically over. Nicholas in fact, is wiping his mouth.

Eustasia: Finished, darling?

Nicholas: Yes, thank you, Eustasia.

Eustasia: A little more toast?

Nicholas: No, thank you, Eustasia.

Eustasia: Just a little tiny teen-weeny bit, if his Eustasia butters it for him?

Nicholas: No, thank you. I've really finished.

Eustasia: Another cup of coffee?

Nicholas: (*With a sigh.*) No, thank you, Eustasia.

Eustasia: Just a little bit of a cup if his Eustasia pours it out for her own Nicholas, and puts the sugar in with her own ickle fingers?

Nicholas: No more coffee, thank you.

Eustasia: Then he shall sit in a more comfy chair while he smokes his nasty horrid pipe, which he loves so much better than his Eustasia.

(*He gets up without saying anything.*)

He doesn't really love it better?

Nicholas: (*Laughing uneasily.*) Of course he doesn't.

Eustasia: Kiss her to show that he doesn't.

Nicholas: You baby. (*He kisses her hand.*)

Eustasia: And now give me your pipe.

(*He gives it to her reluctantly.*
She kisses it and gives it back to him.)

There! And she doesn't really think it's a nasty horrid pipe, and she's ever so sorry she said so . . . Oh! (*She sees a dish of apples suddenly.*)

Nicholas: What is it?

Eustasia: Nicholas never had an apple!

Nicholas: Oh no, thanks, I don't want one.

Eustasia: Oh, but he must have an apple! It's so good for him. An apple a day keeps the doctor away. You *must* keep the doctor away, darling, else poor Eustasia will be miserable.

Nicholas: (*With an effort.*) I've finished my breakfast.

Eustasia: Not even if his Eustasia peels it for him?

Nicholas: No, thank you. I assure you that I have had all I want.

Eustasia: Sure?

Nicholas: Quite sure, thank you. Where are you going to sit?

Eustasia: (*Indicating the sofa.*) Nicholas sit there and Eustasia sit next to him.

Nicholas: (*Without much enthusiasm.*) Right.
(*They sit down.*)

Eustasia: Shall Eustasia fill his pipe for him?

Nicholas: No, thank you. I think I can do it myself. (*He fills it.*)

(*They are silent for a little and at last he speaks uncomfortably.*)

Er—Eustasia.

Eustasia: Yes, darling.

Nicholas: We've been here a week.

Eustasia: Yes, darling. A wonderful, wonderful week. And now today we leave this dear house where we have been so happy together, and go out into the world together——

Nicholas: (*Who has not been listening to her.*) A week. Except for the first day, we have had all our meals alone together.

Eustasia: (*Sentimentally.*) Alone, Nicholas.

Nicholas: Four meals a day—that's twenty-four meals.

Eustasia: Twenty-four!

Nicholas: And at every one of those meals you have asked me at least four times to have something more when I had already said that I didn't want anything more; or, in other words, you have forced me to say "No, thank you, Eustasia," ninety-six times when there was absolutely no need for it.

Eustasia: (*Hurt.*) Nicholas!

Nicholas: (*Inexorably.*) We are both young. I am twenty-six, you are——

Eustasia: (*Hopefully.*) Twenty-five.

Nicholas: (*Looking at her quickly and then away again.*) You are twenty-five. If all goes well, we may look to have fifty years more together. Say two thousand five hundred weeks. Multiply that by a hundred and we see that in the course of our joint lives, you

will, at the present rate, force me to say "No, thank you, Eustasia" two hundred and fifty thousand times more than is necessary.

(*He relights his pipe.*)

Eustasia: (*Pathetically.*) Nicholas! (*She applies her handkerchief.*)

Nicholas: I wondered if we couldn't come to some arrangement about it. That's all.

Eustasia: You're cruel! Cruel! (*She sobs piteously.*)

Nicholas: (*Doggedly.*) I just wondered if we couldn't come to some arrangement.

Eustasia: (*Completely overcome.*) Oh! Oh! Nicholas! My darling!

(*Nicholas, his hands clenched, looks grimly in front of him. He winces now and then at her sobs. He tries desperately hard not to give way, but in the end they are too much for him.*)

Nicholas: (*Putting his arms round her.*) Darling! Don't.

(*She goes on sobbing.*)

There! There! I'm sorry. Nicholas is sorry. I oughtn't to have said it. Forgive me, darling.

Eustasia: (*Between sobs.*) It's only because I love you so much, and w-want you to be well. And you m-must eat.

Nicholas: Yes, yes, Eustasia, I know. It is dear of you.

Eustasia: Ask any d-doctor. He would say you m-must eat.

Nicholas: Yes, darling.

Eustasia: You m-must eat.

Nicholas: (*Resignedly.*) Yes, darling.

Eustasia: (*Sitting up and wiping her eyes.*) What's a wife for, if it isn't to look after her husband when he's ill, and to see that he eats?

Nicholas: All right, dear, we won't say anything more about it.

Eustasia: And when you had that horrid cold and were so ill, the first day after we came here, I did look after you, didn't I, Nicholas, and take care of you and make you well again?

Nicholas: You did, dear. Don't think I am not grateful. You were very kind. (*Wincing at the recollection.*) Too kind.

Eustasia: Not too kind, darling. I love looking after you, and doing things for you, and taking care of you, and cosseting you. (*Thoughtfully to herself.*) Leonard was *never* ill.

Nicholas: Leonard?

Eustasia: My husband.

Nicholas: Oh! . . . I'd never thought of him as Leonard. I prefer not to think about him. I've never seen him, and I don't want to talk about him.

Eustasia: No, darling. *I* don't want to either.

Nicholas: We've taken the plunge and—(*Bravely*) and we're not going back on it.

Eustasia: (*Surprised.*) Darling!

Nicholas: As a man of honour I—Besides you can't go back now—I mean I took you away, and—Well here we are. (*With determination.*) Here we are.

Eustasia: Darling, you aren't regretting?

Nicholas: (*Hastily.*) No, no!

(*She takes out her handkerchief ominously.*)

No, no, no!

(*She begins to sob.*)

No! No! (*He is almost shouting.*) Eustasia, listen! I love you! I'm *not* regretting! I've *never* been so happy!

(*She is sobbing tumultuously.*)

So happy, Eustasia! I have never never been so happy! *Can't* you hear?

Eustasia: (*Throwing herself into his arms.*) Darling!

Nicholas: There, there!

Eustasia: (*Drying her eyes.*) Oh, Nicholas, you frightened me so! Just for a moment I was afraid you were regretting.

Nicholas: No, no!

Eustasia: How right Mr. Latimer was!

Nicholas: (*With conviction.*) He was indeed.

Eustasia: How little we really knew of each other when you asked me to come away with you!

Nicholas: How little!

Eustasia: But this week has shown us to each other as we really are.

Nicholas: It has.

Eustasia: And now I feel absolutely safe. We are ready to face the world together, Nicholas. (*She sighs and leans back happily in his arms.*)

Nicholas: Ready to face the world together. (*He has his pipe in his right hand, which is round her waist. Her eyes are closed, her left hand, encircling his neck, holds his left hand. He tries to bend his head down so as to get hold of his pipe with his teeth. Several times he tries and just misses it. Each time he pulls*

her a little closer to him, and she sighs happily. At last he gets hold of it. He leans back with a gasp of relief.)

Eustasia: (*Still with her eyes closed.*) What is it, darling?

Nicholas: Nothing Eustasia, nothing. Just happiness.

(*Mr. Latimer comes in.*)

Latimer: Good morning, my friends, good morning.

(*They move apart and Nicholas jumps up.*)

Nicholas: Oh, good morning.

Eustasia: Good morning.

Latimer: So you are leaving me this morning and going on your way?

Nicholas: (*Without enthusiasm.*) Yes.

Eustasia: But we shall never forget this week, dear Mr. Latimer.

Latimer: You have forgiven me for asking you to wait a little so as to make sure?

Eustasia: Oh, but you were so right! I was just saying so to Nicholas. Wasn't I, Nicholas?

Nicholas: Yes. About a minute ago. About two minutes ago.

Latimer: And so now you are sure of yourselves?

Eustasia: Oh, so sure, so very sure. Aren't we, Nicholas.

Nicholas: Absolutely sure.

Latimer: That's right. (*Looking at his watch.*) Well, I don't want to hurry you, but if you have any little things to do, the car will be here in half an hour, and——

Eustasia: Half an hour? Oh, I must fly. (*She begins.*)

Nicholas: (*Not moving.*) Yes, we must fly.

Latimer: (*Going to the door with Eustasia.*) By the way you will be interested to hear that I had two other visitors last night.

Eustasia: (*Stopping excitedly.*) Mr. Latimer! You don't mean another—couple?

Latimer: Yes, another romantic couple.

Eustasia: Oh, if I could but see them before we go! Just for a moment! Just to reconcile them to this week of probation! To tell them what a wonderful week it can be!

Latimer: You shall. I promise you that you shall.

Eustasia: Oh, thank you, dear Mr. Latimer!

(*He goes to the door with her. As he comes back, Nicholas is coming slowly towards him.*)

Nicholas: I say.

Latimer: Yes.

Nicholas: (*Thoughtfully.*) I say, what would *you* —I mean—supposing—Because you see—I mean, it isn't as if—Of course, *now*—(*He looks at his watch and finishes up sadly.*) Half an hour. Well, I suppose I must be getting ready. (*He goes towards the door.*)

Latimer: (*As he gets there.*) Er—Nicholas.

Nicholas: Yes?

Latimer: Just a moment.

Nicholas: (*Coming back to him.*) Yes?

(*Latimer takes him by the arm, and looks round the room to see that they are alone.*)

Latimer: (*In a loud whisper.*) Cheer up!

Nicholas: (*Excitedly.*) What!

(*Latimer has let go of his arm and moved away, humming casually to himself. The light dies out of Nicholas' eyes and he shrugs his shoulders despairingly.*)

Nicholas: (*Without any hope.*) Well, I'll go and get ready.

(*He goes out.*

Dominic comes in and begins to rearrange the breakfast table.)

Latimer: Ah, good morning, Dominic.

Dominic: Good morning, sir. A nicish morning it seems to be, sir.

Latimer: A very nicish morning. I have great hopes of the world today.

Dominic: I am very glad to hear it, sir.

Latimer: We must all do what we can, Dominic.

Dominic: That's the only way, isn't it, sir?

Latimer: Great hopes, great hopes.

Dominic. (*Handing him "The Times."*) The paper, sir.

Latimer: Thank you. (*He looks at the front page.*) Anyone married this morning? Dear me, quite a lot. One, two, three, four . . . ten. Ten! Twenty happy people, Dominic!

Dominic: Let us hope so, sir.

Latimer: Let us hope so . . . By the way, how was his lordship this morning?

Dominic: A little depressed, sir.

Latimer: Ah!

Dominic: There seems to have been some misunderstanding about his luggage. A little carelessness on the part of somebody, I imagine, sir.

Latimer: Dear me! Didn't it come with him?

Dominic: I'm afraid not, sir.

Latimer: Tut, tut, how careless of somebody. Can't we lend him anything?

Dominic: Joseph offered to lend him a comb, sir—his own comb—a birthday present last year, Joseph tells me. His lordship decided not to avail himself of the offer.

Latimer: Very generous of Joseph, seeing that it was a birthday present.

Dominic: Yes, sir. Unfortunately Joseph had come down to the last blade of his safety razor this morning. His lordship is rather upset about the whole business, sir.

Latimer: Well, well, I daresay a little breakfast will do him good.

Dominic: Yes, sir. Are you ready for breakfast now, sir?

(*Anne comes in.*)

Latimer: (*Getting up and going down to her.*) Good morning, Anne. May I hope that you slept well!

Anne: Very well, thank you.

Latimer: I am so glad . . . All right, Dominic.

Dominic: Thank you, sir.

(*He goes out.*)

Latimer: You are ready for breakfast?

Anne: Quite ready. But what about Leonard?

Latimer: Leonard?

Anne: I made sure that I was to have a practice breakfast with Leonard this morning. I have been thinking of a few things to say up in my room.

Latimer: (*Smiling.*) Say them to me instead.

Anne: They are very wifely. (*She sits down.*)

Latimer: But think what good practice.

Anne: Very well. (*At the cups.*) Tea or coffee, darling?

Latimer: Oh, no, that will never do. You know by now that I always have coffee—half milk and three lumps of sugar.

Anne. Of course, how silly of me. (*She pours out the coffee.*)

Latimer: (*Taking the covers off the dishes.*) Omelette—fish—kidney and bacon?

Anne: Now *you're* forgetting.

Latimer: (*Putting back the covers.*) No, I'm remembering. Toast and marmalade—isn't that right?

Anne: Quite right, dear.

Latimer. (*To himself.*) I knew she would like marmalade. No wonder that Leonard ran away with her. (*He puts the toast and marmalade close to her.*)

Anne: Your coffee, darling.

Latimer: Thank you, my love . . . "My love" is very connubial, I think.

Anne: Delightfully so. Do go on.

Latimer: Er—I am sorry to see in the paper this morning—which I glanced at, my precious, before you came down— How do you like "My precious"?

Anne: Wonderfully life-like. Are you sure you haven't been married before?

Latimer: Only once. Eustasia. You had not forgotten Eustasia?

Anne: I am afraid I had. In fact, I had forgotten for the moment that you were being Leonard.

Latimer: (*Bowing.*) Thank you. I could wish no better compliment.

Anne: (*Laughing in spite of herself.*) Oh, you're too absurd.

Latimer: (*In Leonard's manner.*) Of course I don't wish to say anything against Eustasia——

Anne: My dear Leonard, I really think we might leave your first wife out of it.

Latimer: Yes, you want to get that off pat. You'll have to say that a good deal, I expect. Well, to resume. I am sorry to see in the paper this morning that Beelzebub, upon whom I laid my shirt for the 2.30 race at Newmarket yesterday—and incidentally your shirt too, darling—came in last, some five minutes after the others had finished the course . . . . . Tut, tut, how annoying!

Anne: Oh, my poor darling!

Latimer: The word "poor" is well chosen. We are ruined. I shall have to work.

Anne: You know what I *want* you to do, Leonard.

Latimer: No, I have forgotten.

Anne: (*Seriously.*) I should like to see you in the House of Lords, taking your rightful place as a leader of men, making great speeches.

Latimer: My dear Anne! I may be a peer, but I am not a dashed politician.

Anne: (*Wistfully.*) I wish you were, Leonard.

Latimer: I will be anything you like, Anne. (*He leans towards her, half-serious, half-mocking.*)

Anne: (*With a little laugh.*) How absurd you are! Some more coffee?

Latimer: (*Passing his cup.*) To which I answer, "A little more milk. Do you realise that this goes on for fifty years?

Anne: Well, and why not?

Latimer: Fifty years. A solemn thought. But do not let it mar our pleasure in the meal that we are having together now. Let us continue to talk gaily together. Tell me of any interesting dream you may have had last night—any little adventure that befell you in the bath—any bright thought that occurred to you as you were dressing.

Anne: (*Thoughtfully.*) I had a very odd dream last night.

Latimer: I am longing to hear it, my love.

Anne: I dreamt that you and I were running away together, and that we lost our way and came to what we thought was an hotel. But it was not an hotel. It was a very mysterious house, kept by a very mysterious man called Mr. Latimer.

Latimer: How very odd. Latimer? Latimer? No, I don't seem to have heard of the fellow.

Anne: He told us that we were his prisoners. That we must stay in his house a week before we went on our way again. That all the doors were locked, and there were high walls round the garden, that the gates from the garden were locked, so that we could not escape, and that we must wait a week together in his house to see if we were really suited to each other.

Latimer: My dear, what an extraordinary dream!

Anne: It was only a dream, wasn't it?

Latimer: Of course! What is there mysterious about the house? What is there mysterious about this —er—Mr. Latimer? And as for anyone being kept prisoner—here—in this respectable England—why!

Anne: It is absurd, isn't it?

Latimer: Quite ridiculous.

Anne: (*Getting up.*) I thought it was. (*She goes to the front door and opens it.*) You see, I thought it was. (*She steps out into the garden.*) You see, the gates are open too! (*She comes back.*) What an absurd dream to have had! (*She sits down again.*)

Latimer: There's no accounting for dreams. I had an absurd one too last night.

Anne: What was it?

Latimer: A lonely house. Father and daughter living together. Father, old, selfish, absorbed in his work. Daughter left to herself; her only companion, books; knowing nothing of the world. A man comes into her life; the first. He makes much of her. It is a new experience for the daughter. She is grateful to him, so grateful, so very proud that she means anything to him. He tells her when it is too late that he is married; talks of an impossible wife; tells her that she is his real mate. Let her come with him and see something of the world which she has never known. She comes . . . . . Dear me, what silly things one dreams!

Anne: Absurd things . . . . . When can we have the car?

Latimer: The car?

Anne: Leonard's car.

Latimer: You wish to continue the adventure?

Anne: Why not?

Latimer: Dear, dear! What a pity! (*Looking at his watch.*) In twenty-five minutes?

Anne: That will do nicely, thank you.

Latimer: We must let Leonard have a little breakfast first, if he is to cross the Channel today. (*He gets up.*) In twenty-five minutes then.

Anne: (*Half holding out her hand.*) I shall see you again?

Latimer: (*Bending and kissing it.*) If only to wish you God-speed.

(*She looks at him for a moment, and then turns and goes out. He looks after her for a little; then picks up his paper and settles with it in an arm-chair, his back to the breakfast table. Leonard comes in. He is in a dirty, rather disreputable, once white, bath-gown. His hair is unbrushed, his cheeks—the cheeks of a dark man—unshaved and blue. He has a horrible pair of bedroom slippers on his feet, above which, not only his socks, but almost a hint of pantaloons, may be seen on the way to the dressing-gown. He comes in nervously, and is greatly relieved to find that the breakfast table is empty. He does not notice Mr. Latimer. On his way to the table he stops at a mirror on the wall, and standing in front of it, tries to persuade himself that his chin is not so bad after all. Then he pours himself out some coffee, helps himself to a kipper and falls to ravenously.*)

Latimer: Ah, good morning, Leonard.

Leonard: (*Starting violently and turning round.*) Good Lord! I didn't know you were there.

Latimer: You were so hungry . . . I trust you slept well.

Leonard: Slept well! Of all the damned draughty rooms—Yes, and what about my luggage?

Latimer: (*Surprised.*) Your luggage?

Leonard: Yes, never put on the car, your fellow what's 'is name—Joseph says.

Latimer: Dear me, we must enquire into this. Lost your luggage? Dear me, that's a very unfortunate start for a honeymoon. That means bad luck, Leonard.

(*Dominic comes in.*)

Dominic, what's this about his lordship's luggage?

Dominic: Joseph tells me there must have been some misunderstanding about it, sir. A little carelessness on the part of somebody, I imagine, sir.

Latimer: Dear me! Didn't it come with him?

Dominic: I'm afraid not, sir.

Latimer: Tut, tut, how careless of somebody! Thank you, Dominic.

Dominic: Thank you, sir.

(*He goes out.*)

Latimer: Lost your luggage. How excessively annoying! (*Anxiously.*) My dear Leonard, what is it?

Leonard: (*Whose face has been shaping for it for some seconds.*) A-tish-oo!

Latimer: At any rate I can find you a handkerchief. (*He does so.*)

(*Leonard takes it just in time and sneezes violently again.*)

Leonard: Thank you.

Latimer: Not at all. That's a very nasty cold you've got. How wise of you to have kept on a dressing-gown.

Leonard: The only thing I had to put on.

Latimer: But surely you were travelling in a suit yesterday? I seem to remember a brown suit.

Leonard: That fool of a man of yours——

Latimer: (*Distressed.*) You don't mean to tell me——

(*Dominic comes in.*)

Dominic, what's this about his lordship's brown suit?

Dominic: Owing to a regrettable misunderstanding, sir, his lordship's luggage——

Latimer: Yes, but I'm not talking about his twenty-five other suits, I mean the nice brown suit that he was wearing yesterday. It must be somewhere. I remember noticing it. I remember—(*He holds up his hand.*) Just a moment, Dominic——

Leonard: A-tish-oo.

Latimer: I remember saying to myself, "What a nice brown suit Leonard is wearing." Well, where is it, Dominic?

Dominic: Yes, sir. I seem to remember the suit to which you are referring. I regret to say that Joseph had an unfortunate accident with it.

Leonard: (*Growling.*) Damned carelessness.

Dominic: Joseph was bringing back the clothes after brushing them, sir, and happened to have them in his arms while bending over the bath in order to test the temperature of the water for his lordship. A little surprised by the unexpected heat of the water, Joseph relinquished the clothes for a moment, and precipitated them into the bath.

Latimer: Dear me, how extremely careless of Joseph!

Dominic: Yes, sir, I have already reprimanded him.

Leonard: The fellow ought to be shot.

Latimer: You're quite right, Leonard. Dominic, shoot Joseph this morning.

Dominic: Yes, sir.

Latimer: And see that his lordship's suit is dried as soon as possible.

Dominic: Yes, sir. It is being dried now, sir.

Latimer: But it must be dried thoroughly, Dominic. His lordship has a nasty cold, and——

Leonard: A-tish-oo!

Latimer: A very nasty one. I'm afraid you are subject to colds, Leonard?

Leonard: The first one I've ever had in my life. (*He sniffs.*)

Latimer: Do you hear that, Dominic? The first one he's ever had in his life.

Dominic: Yes, sir. If you remember, sir, Mr. Nicholas, and one or two other gentlemen who have slept there, caught a very nasty cold. Almost looks as if there must be something the matter with the room.

Leonard: Damned draughtiest room——

Latimer: Dear me! You should have told me of this before. We must have the room seen to at once. And be sure that his lordship has a different room to-night.

Dominic: Yes, sir, thank you, sir.

(*He goes out.*)

Latimer: (*Sympathetically.*) My dear fellow, I am distressed beyond words. But you know the saying, "Feed a cold, starve a fever." You must eat, you must eat. (*He pushes all the dishes round Leonard.*) We must be firm with this cold. We must suffocate it. (*Pressing more dishes upon him.*) You were quite right not to shave. The protection offered by the beard though small is salutary. But I was forgetting—perhaps your razor is lost too?

Leonard: Damned careless fellows!

Latimer: I must lend you mine.

Leonard: (*Feeling his chin.*) I say, I wish you would.

Latimer: I will get it at once. Meanwhile, eat. No half measures with this cold of yours. My poor fellow!

(*He hurries out. Leonard gets busy with his breakfast again.*
Enter Anne.)

Anne: (*Hurrying in.*) Leonard, my dear! (*She observes him more thoroughly.*) My *dear* Leonard!

Leonard: (*His mouth full.*) G'morning, Anne.

Anne: (*Coldly.*) Good morning.

Leonard: (*Getting up, napkin in hand.*) How are you this morning? (*He comes towards her, wiping his mouth.*)

Anne: No, please go on with your breakfast. (*In alarm.*) What is it?

(*His face assumes an agonised expression. He sneezes.*
Anne shudders.)

Leonard: Got a nasty cold. Can't understand it. First I've ever had in my life.

Anne: Do you sneeze like that much?

Leonard: Off and on.

Anne: Oh! . . . Hadn't you better get on with your breakfast?

Leonard: Well, I will if you don't mind. Good thing for a cold, isn't it? Eat a lot.

Anne: I really know very little about colds . . . Do get on with your breakfast.

Leonard: (*Going back.*) Well, I will if you don't mind. You had yours?

Anne: Yes.

Leonard: That's right. (*Resuming it.*) Did you have one of these kippers?

Anne: No.

Leonard: Ah! A pity. I will say that for Latimer's cook. She knows how to do a kipper. Much more difficult than people think.

Anne: I really know very little about kippers.

Leonard: I have often wondered why somebody doesn't invent one without bones. (*He takes a mouthful.*) Seeing what science can do nowadays—(*He stops.*) *Anne's eye is on him. He says nothing but waves his hand for her to look the other way.*

Anne: What is it?

(*He frowns fiercely and continues to wave. She says coldly.*)

I beg your pardon. (*She turns away and he removes a mouthful of bones.*)

Leonard: (*Cheerfully.*) Right oh, darling . . . . After all what do they *want* all these bones for? Other fish manage without them. (*He continues his kipper.*)

Anne: Leonard, when you can spare me a moment I should like to speak to you.

Leonard: (*Eating.*) My darling, all my time is yours.

Anne: I should like your individual attention if I can have it.

Leonard: Fire away, darling, I'm listening.

Anne: (*Going up to him.*) Have you finished your—kipper? (*She takes the plate away.*) What are you going to have next?

Leonard: Well—what do you recommend?

Anne: (*Taking off a cover.*) Omelette? I don't think it has any bones.

Leonard: What's in that other dish?

(*She takes off the cover.*)

Kidneys? What are the kidneys like?

Anne: (*Coldly.*) Well, you can see what they *look* like.

Leonard: Did you try one?

Anne: (*Impatiently.*) They're delightful, I tried several. (*She helps him.*) There! Got the toast? Butter? Salt? What is it?

Leonard: Pepper.

Anne: Pepper—there. Now have you got everything?

Leonard: Yes, thank you, my dear. (*He picks up his knife and fork.*)

Anne: (*Putting them down again.*) Then before you actually begin, I have something I want to say to you.

Leonard: You're very mysterious. What is it?

Anne: There is nothing mysterious about it at all. It's perfectly plain and obvious. Only I do want you to grasp it.

Leonard: Well? (*He blows his nose.*) (*She waits for him to finish.*)

Well? (*He is still flourishing his handkerchief. She waits patiently. He puts it back in his pocket.*) Well?

Anne: The car will be here in a quarter of an hour.

Leonard: The car?

Anne: The automobile.

Leonard: But whose?

Anne: Ours. More accurately, yours.

Leonard: But what for?

Anne: (*Patiently.*) We are running away together, dear. You and I. It had slipped your memory perhaps, but I assure you it is a fact. The car will take us to Dover, and the boat will take us to Calais, and the train will take us to the South of France. You and I, dear. When you've finished your breakfast.

Leonard: But what about Latimer?

Anne: Just you and I, dear. Two of us only. The usual number. We shall not take Mr. Latimer.

Leonard: My dear Anne, you seem quite to have forgotten that this confounded fellow Latimer has got us prisoners here until he chooses to let us go. (*With dignity.*) *I* have not forgotten. I eat his kidneys now, but he shall hear from me afterwards. Damned interference!

Anne: Have you been dreaming, Leonard? *Before* all these kippers and kidneys and things?

Leonard: Dreaming?

Anne: The car will be here in a quarter of an hour. Why not? It is *your* car. This is England; this is the twentieth century. We missed the boat and spent the night here. We go on our way this morning. Why not?

Leonard: Well, you know, I said last night it was perfectly ridiculous for Latimer to talk that way. I mean what has it got to do with *him?* Just a bit of leg pulling—that's what I felt all the time. Stupid joke. (*Picking up his knife and fork.*) Bad taste too.

Anne: You did hear what I said, didn't you? The car will be here in a quarter of an hour. I don't know how long it takes you to—(*She glances him over*) to shave, and—and dress properly, and—and brush your

hair, but I fancy you ought to be thinking about it quite seriously. You can have some more kidneys another time.

Leonard: B-but I can't possibly go like this.

Anne: No, that's what I say.

Leonard: I mean I haven't got any luggage for one thing—and, with a cold like this, I'm not at all sure ——

Anne: You've lost your luggage?

Leonard: Apparently it was left behind by——

Anne: (*With anger.*) You let yourself be tricked and humiliated by this Mr. Latimer, you let *me* be humiliated, and then when I say that, whatever happens, I won't be humiliated, you—you lose your luggage!

Leonard: *I* didn't lose it. It just happens to *be* lost.

Anne: And you catch a cold!

Leonard: *I* didn't catch it. It caught *me.*

Anne: The—the humiliation of it! . . . . . And what do you propose to do now?

Leonard: As soon as my luggage turns up, and I am well enough to travel——

Anne: Meanwhile you accept this man's hospitality——

Leonard: Under protest. (*Helping himself from the dish.*) I shall keep a careful account of everything that we have here——

Anne: Well, that's your third kidney; you'd better make a note of it.

Leonard: (*With dignity.*) As it happens I was helping myself to a trifle more bacon . . . . . As I

say, I shall keep a careful account, and send him a cheque for our board and lodging as soon as we have left his roof.

Anne: Oh! . . . I had some coffee and one slice of toast and a little marmalade. About a spoonful. And a cup of tea and two thin slices of bread and butter upstairs. Oh, and I've had two baths. They're extra, aren't they? A hot one last night and a cold one this morning. I think that's all. Except supper last night, and you wouldn't let me finish that, so I expect there'll be a reduction . . . . . You want a note book with one of those little pencils in it.

Leonard: (*Reproachfully.*) I say, Anne, look here——

Anne: Do go on with your breakfast.

Leonard: You're being awfully unfair. How can we possibly go now? Why, I haven't even got a pair of trousers to put on.

Anne: You're not going to say you've lost those too!

Leonard: (*Sulkily.*) It's not my fault. That fellow—What's 'is name——

Anne: (*Wonderingly.*) What made you ever *think* that you could take anybody to the South of France? Without any practice at all? . . . . . If you had been taking an aunt to Hammersmith—well, you might have lost a bus or two . . . . and your hat might have blown off . . . . . and you would probably have found yourselves at Hampstead the first two or three times . . . . and your aunt would have stood up the whole way . . . . but still you might have got there eventually. I mean, it would be worth trying—if your aunt was very anxious to get to Hammersmith. But the South of France! My dear Leonard! It's so audacious of you.

Leonard: (*Annoyed.*) Now, look here, Anne——

(*Mr. Latimer comes in cheerily with shaving-pot, brush, safety razor and towel.*)

Latimer: Now then, Leonard, we'll soon have you all right. (*He puts the things down.*) Ah, Anne! You don't mind waiting while Leonard has a shave? He wanted to grow a special beard for the Continent but I persuaded him not to. The French accent will be quite enough. (*Picking up the razor.*) Do you mind Wednesday's blade? I used Tuesday's myself this morning.

Anne: Oh, Mr. Latimer, I find that we shall not want the car after all.

Latimer: No?

Anne: No. Poor Leonard is hardly well enough to travel. I hope that by tomorrow, perhaps—But I am afraid that we must trespass on your hospitality until then. I am so sorry.

Latimer: But I am charmed to have you. Let me tell your maid to unpack.

Anne: Don't trouble, thanks. I've got to take my hat off. (*Very sweetly for Latimer's benefit.*) I shan't be a moment, Leonard darling.

(*She goes out.*)

Latimer: Now then, Leonard darling, to work.

Leonard: (*Picking up the things.*) Thanks.

Latimer. But where are you going?

Leonard: Upstairs, of course.

Latimer: Is that wise? With a cold like yours?

Leonard: Damn it, I can't shave down here.

Latimer: Oh, come, we mustn't stand on ceremony when your life is at stake. You were complaining only five minutes ago of the draught in your room. Now, here we have a nice even temperature——

Leonard: Well, there's something in that.

Latimer: There's everything in it. Of course you've never had a cold before, so you don't know, but any doctor will tell you how important it is to stay in one room—with a nice even temperature. You mustn't dream of going upstairs.

Leonard: (*Surrendering.*) Well——

Latimer: That's right. Got everything you want? There are plenty of mirrors. Which period do you prefer? Queen Anne?

Leonard: It's all right, thanks.

Latimer: Good. Then I'll leave you to it.

(*He goes out. Standing in front of a glass on the wall, Leonard applies the soap. His cheeks are just getting beautifully creamy when Nicholas enters.*)

Nicholas: Hallo!

Leonard: (*Looking round.*) Hallo!

Nicholas: Shaving?

Leonard: (*Exasperated.*) Well, what the devil did you think I was doing?

Nicholas: Shaving. (*He sits down. Leonard gets on with the good work.*)

Leonard: A-tish-oo!

Nicholas: Got a cold?

Leonard: Obviously.

Nicholas: (*Sympathetically.*) Horrid, sneezing when you're all covered with soap.

Leonard: Look here, I didn't ask for your company, and I don't want your comments.

Nicholas: Well, if it comes to that, I was here first, and I didn't ask you to shave in this hall.

Leonard: (*With dignity.*) There are reasons why it is necessary for me to shave in the hall.

Nicholas: Don't bother to tell me. I know 'em.

Leonard: What do you mean?

Nicholas: You're the couple that arrived last night.

Leonard: (*Looking at him, thoughtfully.*) And you're the couple that is leaving this morning.

Nicholas: Exactly.

Leonard: Yes, but I don't see——

Nicholas: You haven't tumbled to it yet?

Leonard: Tumbled to what?

Nicholas: The fact that a week ago there were reasons why it was necessary for *me* to shave in the hall.

Leonard: You! . . . . You don't mean——

Nicholas: Yes, I do.

Leonard: You lost your luggage?

Nicholas: Yes.

Leonard: You woke up with a cold?

Nicholas: Yes . . . . Horrid, sneezing when you're all covered with soap.

Leonard: (*Exactly.*) I say, that fellow—what's 'is name—didn't drop *your* clothes in the bath?

Nicholas: Oh, rather . . . Damned smart chap, Latimer.

Leonard: Damned scoundrel.

Nicholas: Oh, no. He's quite right. One learns a lot down here.

Leonard: I shall leave his house at once . . . . . as soon as I have shaved.

Nicholas: You still want to?

(*Leonard looks at him in surprise.*)

Oh, well, you've hardly been here long enough, I suppose.

Leonard: What do you mean? Don't *you* want to any more?

Nicholas: Latimer's quite right, you know. One learns a lot down here.

Leonard: (*Shaving*). What about the lady?

Nicholas: That's the devil of it.

Leonard: My dear fellow, as a man of honour, you're bound to go on.

Nicholas: As a man of honour, ought I ever to have started?

Leonard: Naturally I can't give an opinion on that.

Nicholas: No . . . . . You want to be careful with that glass. The light isn't too good. I should go over it all again.

Leonard: (*Stiffly.*) Thank you. I am accustomed to shaving myself.

Nicholas: I was just offering a little expert advice. You needn't take it.

Leonard: (*Surveying himself doubtfully.*) H'm, perhaps you're right. (*He lathers himself again. In the middle of it he stops and says.*) Curious creatures, women.

Nicholas: Amazing.

Leonard: It's a life's work in itself trying to understand 'em. And then you're no further.

Nicholas: A week told *me* all I wanted to know.

Leonard: They're so unexpected.

Nicholas: So unreasonable.

Leonard: What was it the poet said about them?

Nicholas: What didn't he say?

Leonard: No, *you* know the one I mean. How does it begin? . . . "O woman, in our hours of ease——"

Nicholas: "Uncertain, coy and hard to please."

Leonard: That's it. Well, I grant you *that*——

Nicholas: Grant it me! I should think you do! They throw it at you with both hands.

Leonard: But in the next two lines he misses the point altogether. When—what is it?—"when pain and anguish wring the brow"——

Nicholas: (*With feeling.*) "A ministering angel thou."

Leonard: Yes, and it's a lie. It's simply a lie.

Nicholas: My dear fellow, it's the truest thing anybody ever said. Only—only one gets too much of it.

Leonard: True? Nonsense.

Nicholas: Evidently you don't know anything about women.

Leonard: (*Indignantly.*) *I!* Not know anything about women!

Nicholas: Well, you said yourself just now that you didn't.

Leonard: I never said—what I said——

Nicholas: If you did know anything about 'em, you'd know that there's nothing they like more than doing the ministering angel business.

Leonard: Ministering angel!

Nicholas: Won't you have a little more of this, and won't you have a little more of that, and how is the poor cold today, and——

Leonard: You really think that women talk like that?

Nicholas: How else do you think they talk?

Leonard: My dear fellow! . . . . Why, I mean, just take my own case as an example. Here am I, with a very nasty cold, the first I've ever had in my life. I sit down for a bit of breakfast—not wanting it particularly, but feeling that, for the sake of my health, I ought to try and eat something. And what happens?

(*Latimer has come in during this speech. He stops and listens to it.*)

Latimer: (*Trying to guess the answer.*) You eat too much.

Leonard: (*Turning round angrily.*) Ah, so it's you! You have come just in time, Mr. Latimer. I propose to leave your house at once.

Latimer: (*Surprised.*) Not like that? Not with a little bit of soap behind the ear?

(*Leonard hastily wipes it.*)

The other ear.

(*Leonard wipes that one.*)

That's right.

Leonard: At once, sir.

Nicholas: You'd better come with us. We're just going.

Leonard: Thank you.

Latimer: Four of you. A nice little party.

(*Anne comes in.*)

Leonard: Anne, my dear, we are leaving the house at once. Are you ready?

Anne: (*Looking from one to the other in surprise.*) But I've just taken my hat off. Besides, you can't go like that.

(*Leonard hastily wipes his ear again.*)

Latimer: No, no, she means the costume this time.

Leonard: Mr. Latimer, I insist on having my clothes restored to me.

Latimer: Wet or dry, you shall have them.

Anne: But——

Eustasia: (*From outside.*) Nich-o-las!

(*Leonard looks up in astonishment.*)

Nicholas: (*Gloomily.*) Hallo!

Eustasia: Where are you?

Nicholas: Here!

(*Eustasia comes in.*)

Eustasia: Are you ready, darling? (*She stops on seeing them all, and looks from one to the other. She sees her husband.*) Leonard!

Nicholas: (*Understanding.*) Leonard!

Leonard: Eustasia!

Anne: Eustasia!

(*They stare at each other—open-mouthed—all but Mr. Latimer. His eyes on the ceiling, whistling a little tune to himself. Mr. Latimer walks—almost, you might say, dances—up and down, up and down behind them, "I did this!" he is saying to himself, "I did it!"*)

ACT III

SCENE I

We are just where we were—except that Mr. Latimer has stopped his dance, and is regarding his visitors benevolently. Their mouths are now closed, but they have not said anything yet.

Anne: (*Impatiently.*) Oh, isn't anybody going to say anything? Mr. Latimer, while Leonard is thinking of something, you might introduce me to his wife.

Latimer: I beg your pardon, Eustasia, this is Anne.

Anne: How do you do?

Eustasia: How do you do?

Latimer: Leonard, this is Nicholas.

Nicholas: (*Nodding.*) We've met. Quite old friends.

Leonard: I repudiate the friendship. We met under false pretences. I—I—Well, upon my word, I don't know *what* to say.

Nicholas: Then don't say it, old boy. Here we all are, and we've got to make the best of it.

Leonard: I—I—*a-tish-oo!*

Eustasia: (*Alarmed.*) Leonard, you have a cold?

Nicholas: A very nasty cold.

Anne: (*Coldly.*) It will be better when he has finished his breakfast.

Leonard: (*Hurt.*) I *have* finished my breakfast. A long time ago.

Anne: I beg your pardon. (*She indicates the towel round his neck.*) I misunderstood.

Leonard: (*Pulling it away.*) I've been shaving.

Eustasia: But, Leonard dear, I don't understand. I've never known you ill before.

Leonard: I never have been ill before. But I am ill now. Very ill. And nobody minds. Nobody minds at all. This fellow Latimer invaygles me here—

Latimer: Inveegles.

Leonard: I shall pronounce it how I like. It is quite time I asserted myself. I have been too patient. You invaygle me here and purposely give me a cold. You—(*pointing accusingly to Anne*)—are entirely unmoved by my sufferings, instead of which you make fun of the very simple breakfast which I had forced myself to eat. You—(*to Nicholas*) run away with my wife, at a time when I am ill and unable to protect her, and you—(*to Eustasia*)—well, all I can say is that you surprise me, Eustasia, you surprise me. I didn't think you had it in you.

Latimer: A masterly summing up of the case. Well, I hope you're all ashamed of yourselves.

Eustasia: But, Leonard, how rash of you to *think* of running away with a cold like this. (*She goes up and comforts him.*) You must take care of yourself—Eustasia will take care of you and get you well. Poor boy! He had a nasty, nasty cold, and nobody looked after him. Mr. Latimer, I shall want some mustard, and hot water, and eucalyptus.

Latimer: But of course!

Leonard: (*To Anne.*) There you are! As soon as somebody who really understands illness comes on

the scene, you see what happens. Mustard, hot water, eucalyptus—she has it all at her finger ends.

(*Enter Dominic.*)

Dominic: Yes, sir?

Latimer: A small mustard and water for his lordship.

Eustasia: It's to put his feet in, not to drink.

Latimer: A large mustard and water.

Dominic: Yes, sir.

Eustasia: Hot water.

Dominic: Yes, my lady.

Eustasia: And if you have any eucalyptus——

Dominic: Yes, my lady, we got some in specially for his lordship.

Latimer: Did Mr. Nicholas absorb all the last bottle?

Dominic: Yes, sir.

Nicholas: (*With feeling.*) I fairly lived on it.

Dominic: (*To Eustasia.*) Is there anything else his lordship will require?

Nicholas: What about a mustard-plaster?

Leonard: Please mind your own business.

Eustasia: No, I don't think there's anything else, thank you.

Nicholas: Well, I call that very unfair. I had one.

Leonard: Oh, did you? Well, in that case, Eustasia, I certainly don't see why——

Latimer: (*To Dominic.*) Two mustard-plasters. We mustn't grudge his lordship anything.

Dominic: Yes, sir.

(*He retires.*)

Eustasia: (*To Leonard.*) Now come over here, darling, away from the door. (*She leads him to an armchair in the corner of the room.*) Lean on me.

Anne: Surely one can walk with a cold in the head!

Nicholas: No, it's very dangerous.

Latimer: Nicholas speaks as an expert.

Eustasia: (*Settling Leonard.*) There! Is that comfy?

Leonard: Thank you, Eustasia.

Eustasia: We'll soon have you all right, dear.

Leonard: (*Pressing her hand.*) Thank you.

Latimer: (*After a little silence.*) Well, as Nicholas said just now, "Here we all are and we've got to make the best of it." What are we all going to do?

Anne: Please leave me out of it. I can make my own arrangements. (*She gives them a cool little bow as she goes out.*) If you will excuse me.

(*Dominic comes in with a clinical thermometer on a tray.*)

Dominic: I thought that her ladyship might require a thermometer for his lordship's temperature.

Eustasia: (*Coming to him.*) Thank you. I think it would be safer just to take it. And I wondered if we couldn't just put this screen round his lordship's chair.

Dominic: Certainly, my lady, one can't be too careful. (*He helps her with it.*)

Eustasia: Yes, that's right.

Latimer: (*To Nicholas.*) Did *you* have the screen?

Nicholas: Oh, rather.

Latimer: And the thermometer?

Nicholas: Yes . . . . . Funny thing was I liked it just at first. I don't mean the actual thermometer, I mean all the fussing.

Latimer: It's a wonderful invention, a cold in the head. It finds you out. There's nothing like it, Nicholas, nothing.

Eustasia: (*To Dominic.*) Thank you. And you're bringing the other things?

Dominic: Yes, my lady, as soon as ready.

(*He goes out.*)

Eustasia: Thank you. (*To Leonard.*) Now, dear, Under the tongue. (*She puts it in his mouth.*)

Leonard: (*Mumbling.*) I don't think I ever——

Eustasia: No, dear, don't try to talk. (*She takes out her watch.*)

Nicholas: (*Coming close to Latimer.*) I say——

Latimer: Well?

Nicholas: (*Indicating the screen.*) I say, not too loud.

Latimer: (*In a whisper.*) Well?

Nicholas: Well, what about it?

Latimer: What about what?

Nicholas: I mean, where do I come in? As a man of honour oughtn't I to—er—— You see what I mean? Of course I want to do the right thing.

Latimer: Naturally, my dear Nicholas. It's what one expected of you.

Nicholas: I thought that if I slipped away now, unostentatiously . . . . .

Latimer: With just a parting word of farewell——

Nicholas: Well, that was what I was wondering. Would anything in the nature of a farewell be in good taste?

Latimer: I see your point.

Nicholas: Don't think that I'm not just as devoted to Eustasia as ever I was.

Latimer: But you feel that in the circumstances you could worship her from afar with more propriety.

Nicholas: (*Waving a hand at the screen.*) Yes. You see, I had no idea that they were so devoted.

Latimer: But their devotion may not last forever.

Nicholas: Exactly. That's why I thought I'd slip away now.

Latimer: Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas!

Nicholas: (*A little offended.*) Well, I don't want to say anything against Eustasia——

Latimer: There are so many people who don't want to say anything against Eustasia.

Nicholas: But, you see—— Look out, here's Miss Anne.

(*Anne comes in.*)

Latimer: Anne, you're just in time. Nicholas wants your advice.

Nicholas: I say, shut up! We can't very well——

Anne: Mr. Latimer, I went upstairs to get my things and find my way to the nearest railway station. But—but there is a reason why I am not going after all. Just yet. I thought I'd better tell you.

Latimer: Were you really thinking of going? (*She nods.*) I'm so glad you've changed your mind.

Anne: (*With a smile.*) There are reasons why I had to.

Latimer: Bless them . . . . . Nicholas, I believe she stayed just so that she might help you.

Anne: What does Mr. Nicholas want?

Nicholas: I say, it's awfully good of you and all that, but this is rather—I mean, it's a question that a fellow ought to settle for himself.

Latimer: What he means is, ought *he* to get his things and find his way to the nearest railway station?

Anne: (*Dismayed.*) Oh, no!

Latimer: There you are, Nicholas.

Nicholas: (*Rather flattered.*) Oh, well—well—(*He looks at her admiringly.*) Well, perhaps you're right.

Eustasia: (*The three minutes up.*) There! (*She takes the thermometer out and comes from behind the screen in order to get nearer the light.*)

Latimer: His temperature! This is an exciting moment in the history of the House of Lords. (*He follows Eustasia to the window.*)

Nicholas: (*To Anne.*) I say, do you really think I ought to stay?

Anne: Please, Mr. Nicholas, I want you to stay.

Nicholas: Righto, then I'll stay.

Latimer: (*Over Eustasia's shoulder.*) A hundred and nine.

Leonard: (*Putting his head round the screen.*) I say, what ought it to be?

Nicholas: Ninety-eight.

Leonard: Good Lord, I'm dying!

Eustasia: It's just ninety-nine. A little over normal, Leonard, but nothing to matter.

Latimer: *Ninety*-nine—so it is. I should never have forgiven myself if it had been a hundred and nine.

Nicholas: (*Coming up to Latimer.*) It's all right, I'm going to.

Eustasia: (*Surprised.*) Going to? Going to what?

Nicholas: (*Confused.*) Oh, nothing.

Latimer: What he means is that he is going to be firm. He thinks we all ought to have a little talk about things. Just to see where we are.

Eustasia: Well, things aren't quite as they were, are they? If I'd known that Leonard was ill—but I've seen so little of him lately. And he's *never* been ill before!

Nicholas: Of course we ought to know where we are.

Latimer: Yes. At present Leonard is behind that screen, which makes it difficult to discuss things properly. Leonard, could you——

Eustasia: Oh, we mustn't take any risks. But if we moved the screen a little, and all sat up at that end of the room——

Latimer: Delightful!

Nicholas: (*Leading the way.*) Sit here, Miss Anne, won't you?

(*They arrange themselves. Latimer in the middle.*)

Latimer: There! Now are we all here? . . . . We are. Then with your permission, Ladies and Gentlemen, I will open the proceedings with a short speech.

Nicholas: Oh, I say, must you?

Latimer: Certainly.

Eustasia: (*To Leonard.*) Hush, dear.

Leonard: I didn't say anything.

Eustasia: No, but you were just going to.

Latimer: (*Severely.*) Seeing that I refrained from making my speech when Leonard had the thermometer in his mouth, the least he can do now is to listen in silence.

Leonard: Well, I'm——

Latimer: I resume . . . . By a fortunate concatenation of circumstances, ladies and gentlemen—or, as more illiterate men would say, by a bit of luck—two runaway couples have met under my roof. No need to mention names. You can all guess for yourselves. But I call now—this is the end of my speech, Leonard—I call now upon my noble friend on the right to tell us just why he left the devoted wife by his side in order to travel upon the Continent.

Leonard: Well, really——

Latimer: Naturally Leonard does not wish to say anything against Eustasia. Very creditable to him. But can it be that the devoted wife by his side wishes to say anything against Leonard?

Eustasia: You neglected me, Leonard, you know you did. And when I was so ill——

Leonard: My dear, you were *always* ill. That was the trouble.

Latimer: And you were never ill, Leonard. *That* was the trouble . . . . You heartless ruffian!

Eustasia: (*To Leonard.*) Hush, dear.

Latimer: Why couldn't you have had a cold sometimes? Why couldn't you have come home with a broken leg, or lost your money, or made a rotten speech in the House of Lords? If she could never be sorry for *you,* for whom else could she be sorry, except herself? (*To Eustasia.*) I don't suppose he even lost his umbrella, did he?

Anne: Oh, he must have lost that.

Latimer: Eustasia, ladies and gentlemen, is one of those dear women, those sweet women, those delightful women—(*Aside to Anne*)—stop me if I'm laying it on too thick—those adorable women who must always cosset or be cosseted. She couldn't cosset Leonard; Leonard wouldn't cosset her. Hence—the Dover Road.

Eustasia: How well you understand, Mr. Latimer!

Latimer: Enter, then, my friend Nicholas. (*Shaking his head at him.*) Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas!

Nicholas: (*Uneasily.*) What's all that about?

Latimer: Anything you say will be used in evidence against you. Proceed, my young friend.

Nicholas: Well—well—well, I mean, there she was.

Latimer: Lonely.

Nicholas: Exactly.

Latimer: Neglected by her brute of a husband—(*As Leonard opens his mouth*) fingers crossed, Leonard—who spent day and night rioting in the House of Lords while his poor little wife cried at home.

Nicholas: Well——

Latimer: Then out spake bold Sir Nicholas—(*Aside to Anne.*) This was also composed in my bath——

Then out spake bold Sir Nicholas,
An Oxford man was he:
"Lo, I will write a note tonight
And ask her out to tea."

Nicholas: Well, you see—

Latimer: I see, Nicholas . . . . And so here we all are.

Anne: Except me.

Latimer: I guessed at you, Anne. Did I guess right?

Anne: Yes.

Latimer: And so here we all are . . . . And what are we all going to do? My house is at your disposal for as long as you wish. The doors are open for those who wish to go . . . . Eustasia?

Eustasia: My duty is to stay here—to look after my husband.

Latimer: Well, that settles Eustasia . . . . Anne?

Anne: Of necessity I must stay here—for the present.

Latimer: Well, that settles Anne . . . . Nicholas?

Nicholas: I stay here too—(*Looking at Anne*) from choice.

Latimer: Well, that settles Nicholas . . . . Leonard?

(*Dominic, followed by all the Staff, comes in, together with a collection of mustard-baths, plasters, eucalyptus, etc., etc.*)

Latimer: (*Looking round at the interruption.*) Ah! . . . . And this will settle Leonard.

SCENE II

Three days later, and evening again. Anne is busy with a pencil and paper, an A. B. C. and her purse. She is trying to work out how much it costs to go home, and subtracting three and fourpence ha'penny from it. Having done this, she puts the

paper, pencil and purse in her bag, returns the A. B. C. to its home, and goes towards the door. One gathers that she has come to a decision.

Anne: (*Calling.*) Nich-o-las!

Nicholas: (*From outside.*) Hallo!

Anne: Where—are—you?

Nicholas: Coming. (*He comes.*) Just went upstairs to get a pipe. (*Putting his hand to his pocket.*) And now I've forgotten it.

(*They go to the sofa together.*)

Anne: Oh, Nicholas, how silly you are! (*She sits down.*)

Nicholas: (*Sitting close.*) I don't *want* to smoke, you know.

Anne: I thought men always did.

Nicholas: Well, it depends what they're doing.

(*There is no doubt what he is doing. He is making love to Anne, the dog, and Anne is encouraging him.*)

Anne: (*Looking away.*) Oh!

Nicholas: I say, it has been rather jolly here the last three days, don't you think?

Anne: It *has* been rather nice.

Nicholas: We've sort of got so friendly.

Anne: We have, haven't we?

Nicholas: You've been awfully nice to me.

Anne: You've been nice to *me.*

Nicholas: I should have gone, you know, if it hadn't been for you.

Anne: I don't know *what* I should have done if you had gone.

Nicholas: You did ask me to stay, didn't you?

Anne: Yes, I couldn't let you go.

Nicholas: Do you know what you said? You said, "Please, Mr. Nicholas, I want you to stay." I shall always remember that. (*Fatuously to himself.*) "Please, Mr. Nicholas, I want you to stay." I wonder what made you think of saying that.

Anne: I wanted us to be friends. I wanted to get to know you; to make you think of me as—as your friend.

Nicholas: We *are* friends, Anne, aren't we?

Anne: I think we are now, Nicholas.

Nicholas: (*With a sentimental sigh.*) Friends!

(*Anne looks at him, wondering if she shall risk it; then away again; then summons up her courage and takes the plunge.*)

Anne: Nicholas!

Nicholas: Yes?

Anne: (*Timidly.*) I—I want you to do something for me.

Nicholas: Anything, Anne, anything.

Anne: I don't know whether I ought to ask you.

Nicholas: Of course you ought!

Anne: But you see, we *are* friends—almost like brother and sister——

Nicholas: (*Disappointed.*) Well, I shouldn't put it quite like that——

Anne: And I thought I might ask you——

Nicholas: Of course, Anne! You know I would do anything for you.

Anne: Yes . . . . Well—well—(*In a rush*) Well, then, will you lend me one pound two and sixpence till next Monday?

Nicholas: Lend you——!

Anne: Today's Friday, I'll send you the money off on Sunday. I promise. Of course I know one oughtn't to borrow from men, but you're different. Almost like a brother. I knew you would understand.

Nicholas: But—but—I *don't* understand.

Anne: (*Ashamed.*) You see, I—I only have three and fourpence ha'penny. And it costs one pound five and twopence to get home. (*Indignantly.*) Oh, it's a shame the way men always pay for us, and then when we really want money, we haven't got any . . . . But I will pay you back on Sunday. I have some money at home, I meant to have brought it.

Nicholas: But—but why do you suddenly——

Anne: Suddenly? I've been wanting it ever since that first morning. I went upstairs to get my hat, meaning to walk straight out of the house—and then I looked in my purse and found—(*Pathetically*) three and fourpence ha'penny. What was I to do?

Nicholas: Anyone would have lent you anything.

Anne: (*Coldly*). Leonard, for instance?

Nicholas: (*Thoughtfully.*) Well . . . . no . . . No. You couldn't very well have touched Leonard. But Latimer——

Anne: Mr. Latimer! The man who had brought us here, locked us up here, and started playing Providence to us—I was to go on my knees to *him* and say "Please, dear Mr. Latimer, could you lend me one pound two and sixpence, so that I may run away from your horrid house." Really!

Nicholas: Well, you seem to have been pretty friendly with him these three days.

Anne: Naturally I am polite to a man when I am staying in his house. That's a different thing.

Nicholas: As a matter of fact, Latimer has been jolly decent. Anyway, he has saved us both from making silly asses of ourselves.

Anne: And you think I am grateful to him for that? . . . . Doesn't *any* man understand *any* woman?

Nicholas: (*Annoyed.*) Are you suggesting that *I* don't understand women?

Anne: I'm suggesting that you should lend me one pound two shillings and sixpence.

Nicholas: (*Sulkily, feeling in his pockets.*) Of course, if you're in such a confounded hurry to get away from here—— Do you mind all silver?

Anne: Not at all.

Nicholas: In such a confounded hurry to get away from here—(*He counts the money.*)

Anne: Why ever should I want to stay?

Nicholas: Well—well—(*With a despairing shrug.*) Oh, Lord! . . . Ten shillings . . . fourteen and six . . . why should she want to stay! Why do you think *I'm* staying?

Anne: Because you're so fond of Mr. Latimer. He's so jolly decent.

Nicholas: (*Looking at the money in his hand.*) One pound two shillings and sixpence. I suppose if I told you what I really thought about it all, you'd get on your high horse again and refuse the money from *me.* So I won't tell you. Here you are.

Anne: (*Gently.*) You didn't think I was in love with you, Nicholas?

(*Nicholas looks uncomfortable.*)

In three days? Oh, Nicholas!

Nicholas: Well—well, I don't see—(*Holding out the money.*)

Anne: From a friend?

Nicholas: From a friend.

Anne: Lent to a friend?

Nicholas: Lent to a friend.

Anne: (*Taking it.*) Thank you, Nicholas. (*She gets up. He begins to get up too.*) No, don't bother. (*She walks to the door. At the door she says.*) Thank you very much, Nicholas. (*She goes out.*)

Nicholas: Well, I'm damned!

(*He sits there gloomily, his legs stretched out, and regards his shoes. So far as we can tell he goes on saying, "Well, I'm damned," to himself. Eustasia and Leonard come in. He is properly dressed now, but still under Eustasia's care, and she has his arm, as if he were attempting a very difficult feat in walking across the hall.*)

Nicholas: (*Looking round.*) Hallo! (*Getting up.*) Do you want to come here?

Leonard: (*Hastily.*) Don't go, old boy, don't go. Plenty of room for us all.

Eustasia: Thank you so much. Leonard is not very strong yet. His temperature is up again today. (*To Leonard.*) You will be better on the sofa, darling. (*To Nicholas.*) I'm so sorry to trouble you.

Nicholas: Not at all. I was just going anyhow.

Leonard: (*Sitting on the sofa.*) Oh, nonsense. Stay and talk to us. Plenty of room for us all.

Nicholas: (*Feeling in his pockets.*) Got to get my pipe. Left it upstairs like an ass.

Leonard: (*Taking out his case.*) Have a cigarette instead?

Nicholas: Rather have a pipe, thanks. (*He makes for the door.*)

Leonard: (*Anxiously.*) But you'll come back?

Nicholas: (*Unwillingly.*) Oh—or—righto.

(*He goes out.*)

Leonard: Come and keep us company. (*To Eustasia who is tucking him up.*) Thanks, Eustasia, thanks. That's quite all right.

Eustasia: Another cushion for your back, darling?

Leonard: No, thanks.

Eustasia: Quite sure?

Leonard: Quite sure, thanks.

Eustasia: I can easily get it for you.

Leonard: (*Weakly.*) Oh, very well.

Eustasia: That's right. (*Getting the cushion.*) You *must* be comfortable. Now, are you sure *that's* all right?

Leonard: Quite all right, thank you.

Eustasia: Sure, darling? Anything else you want, I can get it for you at once. A rug over your knees?

Leonard: No, thank you, Eustasia.

Eustasia: You wouldn't like a hot-water bottle?

Leonard: (*With a sigh.*) No, thank you, Eustasia.

Eustasia: You've only got to say, you know. Now shall we talk, or would you like me to read to you? (*She settles down next to him.*)

Leonard: (*Choosing the lesser evil.*) I think read —no, I mean, talk—no, read to me.

Eustasia: It's for you to say, darling.

Leonard: (*His eyes closed.*) Read to me, Eustasia.

Eustasia: (*Opening her book.*) We'll go on from where we left off. We didn't get very far—I marked the place . . . Yes, here we are. " . . . the sandy deserts of Arabia and Africa . . . . . " And then

there's a little footnote at the bottom; that's how I remember it. (*Reading the footnote.*) "Tacit. Annal. l.ii, Dion Casius l. lvi. p. 833 and the speech of Augustus himself." That doesn't seem to mean much. "It receives great light from the learned notes of his French translator M. Spanheim." Well, that's a good thing. Spanheim—sounds more like a German, doesn't it? Now are you sure you're quite comfortable, dear?

Leonard: (*His eyes closed.*) Yes, thank you, Eustasia.

Eustasia: Then I'll begin. (*In her reading-aloud voice.*) "Happily for the repose of mankind, the moderate system recommended by the wisdom of Augustus, was adopted by the fears and vices of his immediate successors. Engaged in the pursuit of pleasure or the exercise of tyranny, the first Caesars seldom showed themselves to the armies, or to the provinces; nor, were they disposed to suffer that those triumphs which their indolence neglected should be usurped by the conduct and valour or their lieutenants." (*Speeding up.*) "The military fame of a subject was considered as an insolent invasion of the Imperial prerogative; and it became the duty as well as interest of every Roman General to guard the frontiers entrusted to his care"—(*Recklessly.*) "without aspiring for conquests which might have proved no less fatal to himself than to the vanquished barbarians" . . . And then there's another footnote. Perhaps it would be better if I read all the footnotes afterwards—what do you think, darling? Or shall we take them as they come?

Leonard: (*Without opening his eyes.*) Yes, dear.

Eustasia: Very well. This is footnote 5. "Germanicus, Suetonius Paulinus and Agricola"—(*She stumbles over the names.*)—"were checked and recalled in the course of their victories. Corbulo was put to

death." Oh, what a shame! "Military merit, as it is admirably expressed by Tacitus, was, in the strictest sense of the word——" well, there are *two* words, and they are both in Latin. I suppose Tacitus wrote in Latin. But it doesn't really matter because it's only a footnote. (*Anxiously.*) Are you liking the book, darling?

Leonard: Very much, dear.

Eustasia: It's nicely written, but I don't think it's very exciting. I don't think Mr. Latimer has a very good taste in books. I asked him to recommend me something really interesting to read aloud, and he said that the two most interesting books he knew were Carlyle's "French Revolution" and—and—(*Looking at the cover.*) Gibbon's "Roman Empires" . . . Fancy, there are four volumes of it and six hundred pages in a volume. We're at page 19 now. (*She reads a line or two to herself.*) Oh now, this *is* rather interesting, because it's all about *us.* "The only accession which the Roman Empire received during the first century of the Christian era, was the province of Britain." Fancy! "The proximity of its situation to the coast of Gaul seemed to invite their arms, the pleasing, though doubtful intelligence of a pearl fishery, attracted their avarice." And then there's a footnote—I suppose that's to say it was Whitstable. (*Getting to it.*) Oh no—"The British pearls proved however, of little value, on account of their dark and livid colour." How horrid. "Tacitus observes——" well, then, Tacitus says something again . . . I *wish* he would write in English . . . Now where was I? Something about the pearls. Oh, yes. "After a war of about forty years—" good gracious!—"undertaken by the most stupid, maintained by the most dissolute, and——"

(*Nicholas returns with his pipe.*)

Nicholas: Oh, sorry, I'm interrupting.

Leonard: (*Waking up.*) No, no. Eustasia was just reading to me. (*To her.*) You mustn't tire yourself, dear. (*To Nicholas.*) Stay and talk.

Nicholas: What's the book? Carlyle's "French Revolution"?

Eustasia: (*Primly.*) Certainly not. (*Looking at the title again.*) Gibbon's "Roman Empire."

Nicholas: Any good?

Eustasia: Fascinating, isn't it, Leonard?

Leonard: Very.

Nicholas: You ought to try Carlyle, old chap.

Leonard: Is *he* good?

Nicholas: (*Who has had eight pages read aloud to him by Eustasia.*) Oh, topping.

Eustasia: (*Looking at her watch.*) Good gracious! I ought to be dressing.

Leonard: (*Looking at his.*) Yes, it *is* about time.

Nicholas: (*Looking at his.*) Yes.

Eustasia: Leonard, darling, I don't think it would be safe for you to change. Not tonight, tomorrow if you like.

Leonard: I say, look here, you said that last night.

Eustasia: Ah, but your temperature has gone up again.

Nicholas: I expect that's only because the book was so exciting.

Leonard: Yes, that's right.

Eustasia: But I took his temperature *before* I began reading.

Nicholas: Perhaps yesterday's instalment was still hanging about a bit.

Eustasia: (*To Leonard.*) No, darling, not tonight. Just to please his Eustasia.

Leonard: (*Sulkily.*) All right.

Eustasia: That's a good boy.

(*She walks to the door, Nicholas going with her to open it.*)

Leonard: I say, don't go, old chap. You can change in five minutes.

Nicholas: Righto.

(*He sees Eustasia out and comes back. There is silence for a little.*)

Leonard: I say!

Nicholas: Yes?

Leonard: (*Thinking better of it.*) Oh, nothing.

Nicholas: (*After a pause.*) Curious creatures, women.

Leonard: Amazing.

Nicholas: They're so unexpected.

Leonard: So unreasonable.

Nicholas: Yes . . .

Leonard: (*Suddenly.*) I hate England at this time of year.

Nicholas: So do I.

Leonard: Do you go South as a rule?

Nicholas: As a rule.

Leonard: Monte?

Nicholas: Sometimes. We *had* thought—I half thought of Nice.

Leonard: Not bad. We were—I think I prefer Cannes myself.

Nicholas: There's not much in it.

Leonard: No . . . (*After a pause.*) Between ourselves, you know—quite between ourselves—I'm about fed up with women.

Nicholas: Absolutely.

Leonard: You are too?

Nicholas: Rather. I should think so.

Leonard: They're so dashed unreasonable.

Nicholas: So unexpected . . .

Leonard: (*Suddenly.*) Had you booked your rooms?

Nicholas: At Nice? Yes.

Leonard: So had I.

Nicholas: At Cannes?

Leonard: Yes . . .I say, what about it?

Nicholas: Do you mean—(*He waves a hand at the door.*)

Leonard: Yes.

Nicholas: Evaporating?

Leonard: Yes. Quite quietly, you know.

Nicholas: Without ostentation.

Leonard: That's it.

Nicholas: It's rather a scheme. And then we shouldn't waste the rooms. At least, only one set of them. I'll tell you what. I'll toss you whether we go to Nice or Cannes.

Leonard: Right. (*He takes out a coin and tosses.*)

Nicholas: Tails.

Leonard: (*Uncovering the coin.*) Heads. Do you mind coming to Cannes?

Nicholas: Just as soon, really. When shall we go? Tomorrow?

Leonard: Mightn't get a chance tomorrow. Why not tonight? It seems a pity to waste the opportunity.

Nicholas: You mean while Eustasia's dressing?

Leonard: The—er—opportunity. Sleep the night at Dover and cross tomorrow morning.

Nicholas: She'll be after us.

Leonard: Nonsense.

Nicholas: My dear man, you don't know Eustasia.

Leonard: I don't know Eustasia? Well!

Nicholas: (*With conviction.*) She'll be after you like a bird. You've never seen Eustasia when she has got somebody ill to look after.

Leonard: I've never seen Eustasia? Well!

Nicholas: My dear chap, you've only had three days of her; I've had six . . . Lord! . . . Look here. We shall have to——

(*Enter Latimer.*)

Latimer: What, Leonard, all alone?

Nicholas: I say, you're the very man we want.

Leonard: (*Frowning——*) S'sh.

Latimer: Leonard, don't "s'sh" Nicholas when he wants to speak to me.

Nicholas: (*To Leonard.*) It's all right old chap, Latimer is a sportsman.

Latimer: (*To Leonard.*) There! You see the sort of reputation I have in the west end. (*To Nicholas.*) What is it you want to do? Run away?

Leonard: Well—er——

Nicholas: I say, however did you guess?

Latimer: Leonard's car has had steam up for the last twenty-four hours, waiting for a word from its owner.

Leonard: (*Seeing the South of France.*) By Jove!

Latimer: And you are going with him, Nicholas?

Nicholas: Yes. Thought I might as well be getting on. Very grateful and all that, but can't stay here for ever.

Latimer: (*Wondering what has happened between Nicholas and Anne.*) So you are going too. I thought —Well! Nicholas is going too.

Leonard: I say, you do understand—I mean about —er—I mean, when I'm quite well again—start afresh and all that. Cosset *her* a bit. But when you're ill—or supposed to be ill—Well, I mean, ask Nicholas.

Nicholas: Oh, rather.

Latimer: My dear Leonard, why these explanations? Who am I to interfere in other people's matrimonial affairs? You and Nicholas are going away—good-bye. (*He holds out his hand.*)

Nicholas: Yes, but what about Eustasia? She's not going to miss the chance of cosseting Leonard just when she is getting into it. She'll be after him like a bird.

Latimer: I see. So you want me to keep her here?

Nicholas: That's the idea, if you could.

Latimer: How can I keep her here if she doesn't want to stay?

Leonard: Well, how do you keep *any*body here?

Latimer: Really, Leonard, I am surprised at you. By the charm of my old world courtesy and hospitality, of course.

Leonard: Oh! Well, I doubt if that keeps Eustasia.

Latimer: (*Shaking his head sadly.*) I am afraid that that is only too true. In fact, the more I think of it, the more I realise that there is only one thing which will keep this devoted wife from her afflicted and suffering husband.

Leonard and Nicholas: What?

(*Dominic comes in.*)

Latimer: His lordship and Mr. Nicholas are leaving at once. His lordship's car will wait for them outside the gates. See that a bag is packed for them.

Dominic: Yes, sir.

Latimer: And come back when you've seen about that.

Dominic: Yes, sir.

(*He goes out.*)

Latimer: The car can return for the rest of your luggage, and take it over in the morning.

Nicholas: Good!

Leonard: Er—thanks very much. (*Anxiously.*) What were you going to say about the only way of—er——

Latimer: The only way of keeping this devoted wife from her afflicted and suffering husband?

Leonard: Yes. What is it?

Latimer: Somebody else must have a temperature. Somebody else must be ill. Eustasia must have somebody else to cosset.

Nicholas: I say, how awfully sporting of you!

Latimer: Sporting?

Nicholas: To sacrifice yourself like that.

Latimer: I? You don't think *I* am going to sacrifice myself, do you? No, no, it's Dominic.

Dominic: (*Coming in.*) Yes, sir.

Latimer: Dominic, are you ever ill?

Dominic: Never, sir, barring a slight shortness of the breath.

Latimer: (*To the others.*) That's awkward. I don't think you can cosset a shortness of the breath.

Nicholas: (*To Dominic.*) I say, you could pretend to be ill, couldn't you?

Dominic: With what object, sir?

Nicholas: Well—er——

Latimer: Her ladyship is training to be a nurse. She has already cured two very obstinate cases of nasal catarrh accompanied by debility and a fluctuating temperature. If she brings one more case off successfully, she earns the diploma and the gold medal of the Royal Therapeutical Society.

Nicholas: That's right.

Dominic: And you would wish me to be that third case, sir?

Nicholas: That's the idea.

Dominic: And be nursed well again by her ladyship?

Latimer: Such would be your inestimable privilege.

Dominic: I am sorry, sir. I must beg respectfully to decline.

Nicholas: I say, be a sport.

Leonard: (*Awkwardly.*) Of course we should—Naturally you would not —er—lose anything by—er—

Latimer: His lordship wishes to imply that not only would your mental horizon be widened during the period of convalescence, but that material blessings would also flow. Isn't that right, Leonard?

Nicholas: A commission on the gold medal. Naturally.

Dominic: I am sorry, sir. I am afraid I cannot see my way,——

Nicholas: I say——

Latimer: Thank you, Dominic.

Dominic: Thank you, sir.

(*He goes out.*)

Nicholas: Well, that's torn it. (*To Latimer.*) If you're quite sure that you wouldn't like to have a go? It's the chance of a lifetime to learn all about the French Revolution.

Latimer: Well, well! Something must be done. (*He smiles suddenly.*) After all, why not?

Leonard: (*Eagerly.*) You will?

Latimer: I will.

Nicholas: I say——

Latimer: (*Waving them off.*) No. no. Don't wait. Fly.

Leonard: Yes, we'd better be moving. Come on!

Nicholas: (*With a grin, as he goes.*) There's an awfully good bit in the second chapter——

Latimer: (*Holding up a finger.*) Listen! I hear her coming.

Leonard: Good Lord!

(*They fly.*

Latimer left alone, gives himself up to thought. What illness shall he have? He rings one of his many bells and Dominic comes in.)

Latimer: Oh, Dominic. In consequence of your obstinate good-health, I am going to sacrifice myself for—I mean, I myself am going to embrace this great opportunity of mental and spiritual development.

Dominic: Yes, sir. Very good of you, I'm sure, sir.

Latimer: What sort of illness would you recommend?

Dominic: How about a nice sprained ankle, sir?

Latimer: You think that would go well?

Dominic: It would avoid any interference with the customary habits at meal-time, sir. There's a sort of monotony about bread-and-milk; no inspiration about it, sir, whether treated as a beverage or as a comestible.

Latimer: I hadn't thought about bread-and-milk.

Dominic: You'll find that you will have little else to think about, sir, if you attempt anything stomachic. Of course you could have the usual cold, sir.

Latimer: No, no, not that. Let us be original . . .

Dominic: How about Xerostomia, sir? Spelt with an x.

Latimer: Is that good?

Dominic: Joseph tells me that his father has had it for a long time.

Latimer: Oh! Then perhaps we oughtn't to deprive him of it.

Dominic: I looked it up in the dictionary one Sunday afternoon, sir. They describe it there as "an abnormal dryness of the mouth."

Latimer: I said I wanted to be original, Dominic.

Dominic: Quite so, sir.

(*They both think in silence.*)

Eustasia: (*Off.*) Dominic! Dominic!

Dominic: That *is* her ladyship, sir.

Latimer: Quick. (*Bustling him off.*) Don't let her come in for a moment. I must assume a recumbent position.

Dominic: Yes, sir.

(*He goes out.*

Latimer lies down at full length on the sofa and begins to groan; putting a hand first on his stomach, then on his head, then on his elbow. Eustasia does not come. He cautiously raises his head; the room is empty.)

Latimer: (*Disappointedly.*) Throwing it away! (*He hears footsteps and settles down again.*)

(*Anne comes in, hat on, bag in hand. She is just at the door when a groan reaches her. She stops. Another groan comes. She puts down her bag and comes towards the sofa with an "Oh!" of anxiety.*)

Latimer: Oh, my poor—er—head! (*He clasps it.*)

Anne: (*Alarmed.*) What is it? (*She kneels by him.*)

Latimer: Oh, my—(*Cheerfully.*) Hallo, Anne, is it you? (*He sits up.*)

Anne: (*Still anxious.*) Yes, what is it?

Latimer: (*Bravely.*) Oh, nothing, nothing. A touch of neuralgia.

Anne: Oh! . . . You frightened me.

Latimer: Did I, Anne? I'm sorry.

Anne: You were groaning so. I thought—I didn't know what had happened . . . (*Sympathetically.*) Is it very bad?

Latimer: Not so bad as it sounded.

Anne: (*Taking off her gloves.*) I know how bad it can be. Father has it sometimes. Then I have to send it away. (*She has her gloves off now.*) May I try?

Latimer: (*Remorsefully.*) Anne!

(*She leans over from the back of him and begins to stroke his forehead with the tips of her fingers. He looks up at her.*)

Anne: Close your eyes.

Latimer: Ah, but I don't want to now.

(*She laughs without embarrassment.*)

Anne: It will go soon.

Latimer: Not too soon . . .

Anne: Aren't faces funny when they're upside down?

Latimer: You have the absurdest little upside-down face that ever I saw, Anne.

Anne: (*Laughing a little.*) Have I?

Latimer: Why do you wear a hat on your chin? (*She laughs.*) Why do you wear a hat?

Anne: I was going away.

Latimer: Without saying good-bye?

Anne: (*Ashamed.*) I—I think so.

Latimer: Oh, Anne!

Anne: (*Hastily.*) I should have written.

Latimer: A post card!

Anne: A letter.

Latimer: With many thanks for your kind hospitality, yours sincerely.

Anne: Yours *very* sincerely.

Latimer: P. S. I shall never see you again.

Anne: P. S. I shall never forget.

Latimer: Ah, but you *must* forget . . .

Anne: (*After a pause.*) Is it better?

Latimer: (*Lazily.*) It is just the same. It will always be the same. It is unthinkable that anything different should ever happen. In a hundred years time we shall still be like this. You will be a little tired, perhaps; your fingers will ache; but I shall be lying here, quite, quite happy.

Anne: You shall have another minute—no more.

Latimer: Then I shall go straight to the chemist, and ask for three pennyworth of Anne's fingers.

(*They are silent for a little. Then she stops and listens.*)

What is it?

Anne: I heard something. Whispers.

Latimer: Don't look round.

(*Leonard and Nicholas in hats and coats creep cautiously in. Very noiselessly, fingers to lips, they open the front door and creep out.*)

Anne: What was it? Was it——

Latimer: An episode in your life. Over, buried, forgotten . . .

Anne: (*Softly.*) Thank you. (*Suddenly with emotion.*) Oh, I do thank you.

Latimer: I have forgotten what you are thanking me for.

(*Dominic comes in, and stops suddenly on seeing them.*)

Dominic: Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.

Latimer: Go on, Anne. (*Happily.*) I am having neuralgia, Dominic.

Dominic: Yes, sir. A stubborn complaint, as I have heard, sir.

Latimer: Miss Anne is making me well . . . What did you want?

Dominic: Her ladyship says will you please excuse her if she is not down tonight.

Latimer: (*To Anne.*) Shall we excuse her if she is not down tonight?

Dominic: The fact is, sir, that Joseph is taken ill suddenly, and——

Latimer: (*To himself.*) I never thought of Joseph!

Anne: Oh, poor Joseph! What is it?

Dominic: A trifling affection of the throat, but necessitating careful attention, her ladyship says.

Latimer: Please tell her ladyship how very much I thank her for looking after Joseph . . . and tell Joseph how very sorry I am for him.

Dominic: Yes, sir.

(*He goes out.*)

Latimer: You can't go now, Anne. You will have to stay and chaperone Eustasia and me.

(*She laughs and shakes her head.*)

Must you go?

Anne: Yes. Tomorrow morning.

Latimer: Back to your father?

Anne: Yes.

(*He looks at her, and nods.*)

Latimer: Let us say good-bye now. There is a magic in your fingers which goes to my head, and makes me think ridiculous things. Let us say good-bye now.

Anne: (*Taking his hand.*) Good-bye. (*She kisses his hand and says*) I wish *you* had been my father. (*Then she goes out.*)

(*Mr. Latimer stands there, wondering how he likes this. He walks across to a mirror to have a look at himself. While he is there Dominic comes in to superintend the laying of the table for three.*)

Latimer: (*At the mirror.*) Dominic, how old would you say I was?

Dominic: More than that, sir.

Latimer: (*With a sigh.*) Yes, I'm afraid I am. And yet I look very young. Sometimes I think I look too young.

Dominic: Yes, sir.

Latimer: Miss Anne has just asked me to be her father.

Dominic: Very considerate of her, I'm sure, sir.

Latimer: Yes . . . To prevent similar mistakes in the future, I think I shall wear a long white beard.

Dominic: Yes, sir. Shall I order one from the stores?

Latimer: Please.

Dominic: Thank you, sir . . . Is Miss Anne returning tomorrow, sir?

Latimer: Yes . . . don't over-do the length, Dominic, and I like the crinkly sort.

Dominic: Yes, sir . . . One of our most successful weeks on the whole if I may say so, sir.

Latimer: (*thoughtfully.*) Yes . . . Yes . . .

(*The front door bell rings. With a little start he pulls himself together and goes out, saying as he goes*——) Well, well, we must all do what we can, Dominic.

Dominic: That's the only way, isn't it, sir?

(*The room is now just as we saw it on that first night. Dominic draws the curtains and opens the big front door.*)

A Voice: Oh—er—is this—er—an hotel? My chauffeur said—we've had an accident, been delayed on the way—he said that——

(*Evidently another romantic couple. Let us leave them to Mr. Latimer.*)

THE TRUTH ABOUT BLAYDS

CHARACTERS

Oliver Blayds	
Isobel	*His Younger Daughter.*
Marion Blayds-Conway	*His Eldest Daughter.*
William Blayds-Conway	*His Son-in-Law.*
Oliver Blayds-Conway Septima Blayds-Conway	*His Grandchildren.*
A. L. Royce	
Parsons	

Scene: A room in Oliver Blayd's house in Portman Square.

Act I. Afternoon.

Act II. Morning, four days later.

Act III. Afternoon, three days later.

ACT I

A solid handsomely-furnished room in a house in Portman Square—solid round table, solid writing desk, solid chairs and sofa, with no air of comfort, but only of dignity. At the back is a painting of Oliver Blayds, also handsome and dignified . . . Oliver Blayds-Conway, his young grandson, comes in with Royce, the latter a clean-shaven man of forty whose thick dark hair shows a touch of grey. It is about three o'clock in the afternoon.

Oliver: (*As he comes in.*) This way. (*He holds the door open for Royce.*)

Royce: (*Coming in.*) Thanks.

Oliver: Some of the family will be showing up directly. Make yourself comfortable. (*He sits in one of the dignified chairs.*)

Royce: Thanks. (*He looks round the room with interest and sees the picture over the fireplace.*) Hullo, there he is.

Oliver: What? (*Bored.*) Oh, the old 'un, yes.

Royce: (*Reverently.*) Oliver Blayds, the last of the Victorians.

(*Oliver sighs and looks despairingly to Heaven.*)

I can't take my hat off because it's off already, but I should like to.

Oliver: Good Lord, you don't really feel like that, do you?

Royce: Of course. Don't you?

Oliver: Well, hardly. He's my grandfather.

Royce: True. (*Smiling.*) All the same, there's nothing in the Ten Commandments about *not* honouring your grandfather.

Oliver: Nothing about honouring 'em either. It's left optional. Of course, he's a wonderful old fellow—ninety and still going strong; but,—well, as I say, he's my grandfather.

Royce: I'm afraid, Conway, that even the fact of his being your grandfather doesn't prevent me thinking him a very great poet, a very great philosopher, and a very great man.

Oliver: (*Interested.*) I say, do you really mean that, or are you just quoting from the Address you've come to present?

Royce: Well, it's in the Address, but then I wrote the Address, and got it up.

Oliver: Yes, I know—you told me—To Oliver Blayds on his ninetieth birthday: Homage from some of the younger writers. Very pretty of them and all that, and the old boy will love it. But do they really feel like that about him—that's what interests me. I've always thought of him as old-fashioned, early Victorian, and that kind of thing.

Royce: Oh, he is. Like Shakespeare. Early Elizabethan and that kind of thing.

Oliver: Shakespeare's different. I meant more like Longfellow . . . Don't think I am setting up my opinion against yours. If you say that Blayds' poetry is as good as the best, I'll take your word for it. Blayds

the poet, *you're* the authority. Blayds the grandfather, *I* am.

Royce: All right then, you can take my word for it that his best is as good as the best. Simple as Wordsworth, sensuous as Tennyson, passionate as Swinburne.

Oliver: Yes, but what about the modern Johnnies? The Georgians.

Royce: When they're ninety I'll tell you. If I'm alive.

Oliver: Thanks very much.

(*There is a short silence. Royce leaves the picture and comes slowly towards the writing table.*)

Oliver: (*Shaking his head.*) Oh, no!

Royce: (*Turning round.*) What?

Oliver: That's not the table where the great masterpieces are written, and that's not the pen they are written with.

Royce: My dear fellow——

Oliver: Is there a pen there, by the way?

Royce: (*Looking.*) Yes. Yours?

Oliver: The family's. You've no idea how difficult it is to keep pens there.

Royce: Why, where do they go to?

Oliver: The United States, mostly. Everybody who's let in here makes for the table sooner or later and pinches one of the pens. "Lands' sake, what a head," they say, waving at the picture with their right hand and feeling behind their back with the left; it's wonderful to see 'em. Tim, my sister—Tim and I glued a pen on to the tray once when one of 'em was coming, and watched him clawing at it for about five minutes, and babbling about the picture the whole time.

I should think he knew what the poet Blayds looked like by the time he got the pen into his pocket.

Royce: (*Going back to the picture.*) Well, it's a wonderful head.

Oliver: Yes, I will say that for the old boy, he does look like somebody.

Royce: When was this done?

Oliver: Oh, about eighteen years ago.

Royce: Yes. That was about when I met him.

Oliver: You never told me you'd met him. Did you meet *me* by any chance?

Royce: No.

Oliver: I was five then, and people who came to see Blayds the poet patted the head of Blayds the poet's grandson and said: "Are you going to be a poet too, my little man, when you grow up?"

Royce: (*Smiling.*) And what did Blayds the poet's grandson say?

Oliver: Urged on by Blayds the poet's son-in-law Blayds the poet's grandson offered to recite his grandfather's well-known poem "A Child's Thoughts on Waking." I'm sorry you missed it, Royce, but it's no good asking for it now.

Royce: (*Half to himself.*) It was at Bournemouth. He was there with his daughter. Not your mother, she would have been younger than that.

Oliver: You mean Aunt Isobel.

Royce: Isobel, yes. (*After a little silence.*) Isobel Blayds. Yes, that was eighteen years ago. I was about your age.

Oliver: A fine handsome young fellow like me?

Royce: Yes.

Oliver: Any grandfathers living?

Royce: No.

Oliver: Lucky devil. But I don't suppose you realised it.

Royce: No, I don't think I realised it.

Oliver: (*Thinking it out.*) I suppose if I had a famous father I shouldn't mind so much. I should feel that it was partly my doing. I mean that he wouldn't have begun to be famous until I had been born. But the poet Blayds was a world-wide celebrity long before I came on the scene, and I've had it hanging over me ever since . . . . Why do you suppose I am a member of the club?

Royce: Well, why not? It's a decent club. We are all very happy there.

Oliver: Yes, but why did they elect *me?*

Royce: Oh, well, if we once began to ask ourselves that——

Oliver: Not at all. The answer in your case is because A. L. Royce is a well-known critic and a jolly good fellow. The answer in my case is because there's a B. in both. In other words, because there's a Blayds in Blayds-Conway. If my father had stuck to his William Conway when he got married, I should never have been elected. Not at the age of twenty-two, anyway.

Royce: Then I'm very glad he changed his name. Because otherwise, it seems, I might not have had the pleasure of meeting you.

Oliver: Oh, well, there's always a something. But compliments aside, it isn't much fun for a man when things happen to him just because of the Blayds in Blayds-Conway. You know what I am doing now, don't you? I told you.

Royce: Secretary to some politician, isn't it?

Oliver: Yes. And why? Because of the Blayds in——

Royce: Oh, nonsense!

Oliver: It's true. Do you think I want to be a private secretary to a dashed politician? What's a private secretary at his best but a superior sort of valet? I wanted to be a motor engineer. Not allowed. Why not? Because the Blayds in Blayds-Conway wouldn't have been any use. But politicians simply live on that sort of thing.

Royce: What sort of thing?

Oliver: Giving people jobs because they're the grandsons of somebody.

Royce: Yes, I wonder if I was as cynical as you eighteen years ago.

Oliver: Probably not; there wasn't a Grandfather Royce. By the way, talking about being jolly good fellows and all that, have you noticed that I haven't offered you a cigarette yet?

Royce: I don't want to smoke.

Oliver: Well, that's lucky. Smoking isn't allowed in here.

Royce: (*Annoyed by this.*) Now look here, Conway, do you mind if I speak plainly?

Oliver: Do. But just one moment before you begin. My name, unfortunately is *Blayds*-Conway. Call me Conway at the Club and I'll thank you for it. But if you call me Conway in the hearing of certain members of my family, I'm afraid there will be trouble. Now what were you going to say?

Royce: (*His annoyance gone.*) Doesn't matter.

Oliver: No, do go on, Mr. Blayds-Royce.

Royce: Very well, Mr. Blayds-Conway. I am old enough to be—no, not your grandfather—your uncle—

and I want to say this. Oliver Blayds is a very great man and also a very old man, and I think that while you live in the house of this very great man, the inconveniences to which his old age puts you, my dear Conway——

Oliver: Blayds-Conway.

Royce: (*Smiling.*) Blayds-Conway, I'm sorry.

Oliver: Perhaps you'd better call me Oliver.

Royce: Yes, I think I will. Well, then, Oliver——

Oliver: Yes, but you've missed the whole point. The whole point is that I don't *want* to live in his house. Do you realise that I've never had a house I could call my own? I mean a house where I could ask people. I brought you along this afternoon because you'd got permission to come anyhow with that Address of yours. But I shouldn't have dared to bring anybody else along from the club. Here we all are, and always have been, living not *our* lives, but *his* life. Because—well, just because he likes it so.

Royce: (*Almost to himself.*) Yes . . . yes . . . I know.

Oliver: Well!

(*Septima Blayds-Conway comes in, a fair-haired nineteen-year-old modern, with no sentimental nonsense about her.*)

Septima: Hullo!

Oliver: (*Half getting out of his chair.*) Hullo, Tim. Come and be introduced. This is Mr. A. L. Royce. My sister, Septima.

Royce: (*Mechanically quoting.*)

"Septima, seventh dark daughter;
I saw her once where the black pines troop to the water—
A rock-set river that broke into bottomless pools ——"

Septima: Thank you very much, Mr. Royce. (*Holding out her hand to Oliver.*) Noll, I'll trouble you.

Oliver: (*Feeling in his pockets.*) Damn! I did think Royce—(*He hands her a shilling.*) Here you are.

Septima: Thanks. Thank you again, Mr. Royce.

Royce: I'm afraid I don't understand.

Septima: It's quite simple. I get a shilling when visitors quote "Septima" at me, and Noll gets a shilling when they don't.

Oliver: (*Reproachfully.*) I did think that *you* would be able to control yourself, Royce.

Royce: (*Smiling.*) Sorry! My only excuse is that I never met anyone called Septima before, and that it came quite unconsciously.

Septima: Oh, don't apologise. I admire you immensely for it. It's the only fun I get out of the name.

Oliver: Septima Blayds-Conway, when you're the only daughter and fair at that—I ask you.

Royce: (*Defensively.*) It's a beautiful poem.

Septima: Have you come to see Blayds the poet?

Royce: Yes.

Oliver: One of the homage merchants.

Royce: Miss Blayds-Conway, I appeal to you.

Septima: Anything I can do in return for your shilling——

Royce: I have come here on behalf of some of my contemporaries in order to acquaint that very great man Oliver Blayds with the feelings of admiration which we younger writers entertain for him. It ap-

pears now that not only is Blayds a great poet and a great philosopher, but also a——

Oliver: Great grandfather.

Royce: But also a grandfather. Do you think you can persuade your brother that Blayds' public reputation as a poet is in no way affected by his private reputation as a grandfather, and beg him to spare me any further revelations.

Septima: Certainly; I could do all that for ninepence, and you'd still be threepence in hand. (*Sternly to Oliver.*) Blayds-Conway, young fellow, have you been making r-revelations about your ger-rand-father?

Oliver: My dear girl, I've made no r-revelations whatever. What's upset him probably is that I refused to recite to him "A Child's Thoughts on Waking."

Septima: Did he pat your head and ask you to?

Royce: No, he didn't.

Septima: Well, you needn't be huffy about it, Mr. Royce. You would have been in very good company. Meredith and Hardy have, and lots of others.

Oliver: Well, anyway, I've never been kissed by Maeterlinck.

Septima: (*Looking down coyly.*) Mr. Royce, you have surprised my secret, which I have kept hidden these seventeen years. Materlinck—Maurice and I——

Royce: Revelations was not quite the word. What I should have said was that I have been plunged suddenly, and a little unexpectedly, into an unromantic matter-of-fact atmosphere which hardly suits the occasion of my visit. On any other day—you see what I mean, Miss Septima.

Septima: You're quite right. This is not the oc-

casion for persiflage. Besides we're very proud of him really.

Royce: I'm sure you are.

Septima: (*Weightily.*) You know, Noll, there are times when I think that possibly we have misjudged Blayds.

Oliver: Blayds the poet or Blayds the man?

Septima: Blayds the man. After all, Uncle Thomas was devoted to him, and *he* was rather particular. Wasn't he, Mr. Royce?

Royce: I don't think I know your Uncle Thomas, do I?

Septima: He wasn't mine, he was Mother's.

Oliver: The Sage of Chelsea.

Royce: Oh, Carlyle. Surely——

Septima: Mother called them all "uncle" in her day.

Royce: Well, now, there you are. That's one of the most charming things about Oliver Blayds. He has always had a genius for friendship. Read the lives and letters of all the great Victorians, and you find it all the way. They loved him. They——

Oliver: (*Striking up.*) God save our gracious Queen!

Royce: (*With a good-humoured shrug.*) Oh, well,

Septima: Keep it for Father and Mother, Mr. Royce. We're hopeless. Shall I tell you why?

Royce: Yes?

Septima: When you were a child, did you ever get the giggles in church?

Royce: Almost always—when the Vicar wasn't looking.

Septima: There's something about it, isn't there—

the solemnity of it all—which starts you giggling. When the Vicar isn't looking.

Royce: Yes.

Septima: Exactly. And that's why *we* giggle—when the Vicar isn't looking.

Marion: (*Off.*) Septima!

Oliver: And here comes the Vicar's wife.

(*Marion Blayds-Conway is* 55 *now. A dear foolish woman, who has never got over the fact that she is Oliver Blayds' daughter, but secretly thinks that it is almost more wonderful to be William Blayds-Conway's wife.*)

Marion: Oh, there you are. Why didn't you—(*She sees Royce.*) Oh!

Oliver: This is Mr. A. L. Royce, Mother.

Marion: (*Distantly.*) How do you do?

Royce: How do you do?

(*There is an awkward silence.*)

Marion: You'll excuse me a moment, Mr—er—er——

Oliver: Royce, Mother, A. L. Royce.

Marion: Septima!—This is naturally rather a busy day, Mr.—er—We hardly expected—(*She frowns at Oliver who ought to have known better by this time.*) Septima, I want you just a moment—Oliver will look after his friend. I'm sure you'll understand, Mr—er——

Royce: Oh, quite. Of course.

Septima: Mr. Royce has come to see Grandfather, Mother.

Marion: (*Appalled.*) To see Grandfather!

Royce: I was hoping—Mr. Blayds-Conway was good enough to say——

Marion: I am afraid it is quite impossible. I am very sorry, but really quite impossible. My son shouldn't have held out hopes.

Oliver: He didn't. You're barking up the wrong tree, Mother. It's Father who invited him.

Royce: I am here on behalf of certain of my contemporaries——

Oliver: Homage from some of our younger writers——

Royce: Mr. Blayds was gracious enough to indicate that——

Septima: (*In a violent whisper.*) A. L. Royce, Mother!

Marion: Oh! Oh, I beg your pardon. Why didn't you tell me it was A. L. Royce, Oliver? Of course! We wrote to you.

Royce: Yes.

Marion: (*All hospitality.*) How silly of me! You must forgive me, Mr. Royce. Oliver ought to have told me. Grandfather—Mr. Blayds—will be ready at three-thirty. The doctor was very anxious that Grandfather shouldn't see anyone this year—outside the family, of course. I couldn't tell you how many people wrote asking if they could come today. Presidents of Societies and that sort of thing. From all over the world. Father did tell us. Do you remember, Septima?

Septima: I'm afraid I don't, Mother. I know I didn't believe it.

Marion: (*To Royce.*) Septima—after the poem, you know. "Septima, seventh dark daughter—"(*And she would quote the whole of it, but that her children interrupt.*)

Oliver: (*Solemnly.*) Don't say you've never heard of it, Royce.

Septima: (*Distressed.*) I don't believe he has.

Oliver: (*Encouragingly.*) You must read it. I think you'd like it.

Marion: It's one of his best known. The *Times* quoted it only last week. We had the cutting "Septima, seventh dark daughter—" It was a favourite of my husband's even before he married me.

Royce: It has been a favourite of mine for many years.

Marion: And many other people's, I'm sure. We often get letters—Oh, if you could see the letters we get!

Royce: I wonder you don't have a secretary.

Marion: (*With dignity.*) My husband—Mr. Blayds-Conway—*is* Grandfather's secretary. He was appointed to the post soon after he married me. Twenty-five years ago. There is almost nothing he mightn't have done, but he saw where his duty lay, and he has devoted himself to Grandfather—to Mr. Blayds—ever since.

Royce: I am sure we are all grateful to him.

Marion: Grandfather, as you know, has refused a Peerage more than once. But I always say that if devotion to duty counts for anything, William, my husband, ought to have been knighted long ago. Perhaps when Grandfather has passed away— But there!

Royce: I was telling Oliver that I did meet Mr. Blayds once—and Miss Blayds. Down at Bournemouth. She was looking after him. He wasn't very well at the time.

Marion: Oh, Isobel, yes. A wonderful nurse. I don't know what Grandfather would do without her.

Royce: She is still—? I thought perhaps she was married, or——

Marion: Oh, no! Isobel isn't the marrying sort. I say that I don't know what Grandfather would do without her, but I might almost say that I don't know what she would do without Grandfather. (*Looking at her watch.*) Dear me, I promised Father that I would get those letters off. Septima dear, you must help me. Have you been round the house at all, Mr. Royce?

Royce: No, I've only just come.

Marion: There are certain rooms which are shown to the public. Signed photographs, gifts from Tennyson, Ruskin, Carlyle and many others. Illuminated addresses and so on, all most interesting. Oliver, perhaps you would show Mr. Royce—if it would interest you——

Royce: Oh, indeed, yes.

Marion: Oliver!

Oliver: (*Throwing down the book he was looking at.*) Right. (*He gets up.*) Come on, Royce. (*As they go out.*) There's one thing that I can show you, anyway.

Royce: What's that?

Oliver: (*Violently.*) My bedroom. We're allowed to smoke there.

(*They go out.*)

Marion: (*Sitting down at the writing-table.*) He seems a nice man. About thirty-five, wouldn't you say—or more?

Septima: Forty. But you never can tell with men. (*She comes to the table.*)

Marion: (*Getting to work.*) Now those letters just want putting into their envelopes. And *those* want envelopes written for them. If you will read out the

addresses, dear—I think that will be the quickest way—I will——

Septima: (*Thinking her own thoughts.*) Mother!

Marion: Yes, dear? (*Writing.*) Doctor John Treherne.

Septima: I want to speak to you.

Marion: Do you mean about anything important?

Septima: For me, yes.

Marion: You haven't annoyed your Grandfather, I hope.

Septima: It has nothing to do with Grandfather.

Marion: Beechcroft, Bexhill-on-Sea. We've been so busy all day. Naturally, being the Birthday. Couldn't you leave it till tomorrow, dear?

Septima: (*Eagerly.*) Rita Ferguson wants me to share rooms with her. You know I've always wanted to, and now she's just heard of some; there's a studio goes with it. On Campden Hill.

Marion: Yes, dear. We'll see what Grandfather says.

Septima: (*Annoyed.*) I said that this has nothing to do with Grandfather. We're talking about *me*. It's no good trying to do anything here, and——

Marion: There! I've written *Campden* Hill, how stupid of me. *Haverstock* Hill. We'll see what Grandfather says, dear.

Septima: (*Doggedly.*) It has nothing to do with Grandfather.

Marion: (*Outraged.*) Septima!

Septima: "We'll see what Grandfather says"—that has always been the answer to everything in this house.

Marion: (*As sarcastically as she can.*) You can hardly have forgotten who Grandfather is.

Septima: I haven't.

Marion: What was it the *Telegraph* called him only this morning? "The Supreme Songster of an Earlier Epoch."

Septima: I said that I hadn't forgotten what Grandfather *is*. You're telling me what he *was*. He *is* an old man of ninety. I'm twenty. Anything that I do will affect him for at most five years. It will affect me for fifty years. That's why I say this has nothing to do with Grandfather.

Marion: (*Distressed.*) Septima, sometimes you almost seem as if you were irreligious. When you think who Grandfather is—and his birthday too. (*Weakly.*) You must talk to your Father.

Septima: That's better. Father's only sixty.

Marion: You must talk to your Father. He will see what Grandfather says.

Septima: And there we are—back again to ninety! It's always the way.

Marion: (*Plaintively.*) I really don't understand you children. You ought to be proud of living in the house of such a great man. I don't know what Grandfather will say when he hears about it. (*Tearfully.*) The Reverend William Styles, Hockly Vicarage, Bishops Stortford.

Septima: (*Thoughtfully.*) I suppose Father would cut off my allowance if I just went.

Marion: Went?

Septima: Yes. Would he? It would be beastly unfair of course, but I suppose he would.

Marion: Septima, you're *not* to talk like that.

Septima: I think I'll get Aunt Isobel to tackle Grandfather. She's only forty. Perhaps *she* could persuade him.

Marion: I won't hear another word. And you had better tidy yourself up. I will finish these letters myself.

Septima: (*Going to the door.*) Yes, I must go and tidy up. (*At the door.*) But I warn, you Mother, I mean to have it out this time. And if Grandfather— (*She breaks off as her Father comes in.*) Oh, Lord! (*She comes back into the room, making way for him.*)

(*William Blayds-Conway was obviously meant for the Civil Service. His prim neatness, his gold pince-nez, his fussiness would be invaluable in almost any Department. However, running Blayds is the next best thing to running the Empire.*)

William: What is it, Septima? Where are you going?

Septima: Tidy myself up.

Wiliam: That's right. And then you might help your mother to entertain Mr. Royce until we send for him. Perhaps we might—wait a moment——

Marion: Oh, have you seen Mr. Royce, William? He seems a nice young man, doesn't he? I'm sure Grandfather will like him.

William: I still think that it was very unwise of us to attempt to see anybody today. Naturally I made it clear to Mr. Royce what a very unexpected departure this is from our usual practice. I fancy that he realises the honour which we have paid to the younger school of writers. Those who are knocking at the door, so to speak.

Marion: Oh, I'm sure he does.

Septima: Does anybody want me?

William: Wait a moment, please. (*He takes a key out of his pocket and considers.*) Yes . . . Yes . . .

(*He gives the key to Septima.*) You may show Mr. Royce the autograph letter from Queen Victoria, on the occasion of your Grandmother's death. Be very careful, please. I think he might be allowed to take it in his hands—don't you think so, Marion?—but lock it up immediately afterwards, and bring me back the key.

Septima: Yes, Father. (*As she goes.*) What fun he's going to have!

William: Are those the letters?

Marion: Yes, dear, I've nearly finished them.

William: They will do afterwards. (*Handing her a bunch of telegrams.*) I want you to sort these telegrams. Isobel is seeing about the flowers?

Marion: Oh, yes, sure to be, dear. How do you mean, sort them?

William: In three groups will be best. Those from societies or public bodies, those from distinguished people, including Royalty—you will find one from the Duchess there; her Royal Highness is very faithful to us—and those from unknown or anonymous admirers.

Marion: Oh, yes, I see, dear. (*She gets to work.*)

William: He will like to know who have remembered him. I fancy that we have done even better than we did on the eightieth birthday, and of course the day is not yet over. (*He walks about arranging things.*)

Marion: Yes, dear.

William: (*Frowning anxiously.*) What did we do last year about drinking the health? Was it in here, or did we go to his room?

Marion: He was down to lunch last year. Don't you remember, dear?

William: Ah, yes, of course. Stupid of me. Yes, this last year has made a great difference to him. He

is breaking up, I fear. We cannot keep him with us for many more birthdays.

Marion: Don't say that, dear.

William: Well, we can but do our best.

Marion: What would you like to do, dear, about the health?

William: H'm. Let me think. (*He thinks.*)

Marion: (*Busy with the telegrams.*) Some of these are a little difficult. Do you think that Sir John and Lady Wilkins would look better among the distinguished people including Royalty, or with the unknown and anonymous ones?

William: Anybody doubtful is unknown. I only want a rough grouping. We shall have a general acknowledgment in the *Times*. And oh, that reminds me. I want an announcement for the late editions of the evening papers. Perhaps you had better just take this down. You can finish those afterwards.

Marion: Yes, dear. (*She gets ready.*) Yes, dear?

William: Oliver Blayds, ninety today.

Marion: (*Writing.*) Oliver Blayds, ninety today.

William: The veteran poet spent his ninetieth birthday——

Marion: (*To herself.*) The veteran poet——

William: Passed his ninetieth birthday—that's better—passed his ninetieth birthday quietly, amid his family——

Marion: Amid his family——

William: At his well-known house—residence—in Portman Square. (*In his conversational voice.*) We will drink the health in here. See that there is an extra glass for Mr. Royce. "In Portman Square"—have you got that?

Marion: Yes, dear.

William: Mr. William Blayds-Conway, who courteously gave—granted our representative an interview, informed us that the poet is in good health—It's a pity you never learnt shorthand, Marion.

Marion: I did try, dear.

William: Yes, I know . . . in good health——

Marion: Good health——

William: And keenly appreciative of the many tributes of affection which he had received.

Marion: Which he had received.

William: Among those who called during the day were——

Marion: Yes, dear?

William: Fill that in from the visitors' book. (*He holds out his hand for the paper.*) How does that go?

Marion: (*Giving it to him.*) I wasn't quite sure how many "p's" there were in appreciative.

William: Two.

Marion: Yes, I thought two was safer.

William: (*Handing it back to her.*) Yes, that's all right. (*Bringing out his keys.*) I shall want to make a few notes while Mr. Royce is being received. It may be that Oliver Blayds will say something worth recording. One would like to get something if it were possible. (*He has unlocked a drawer in the table and brought out his manuscript book.*) And see that that goes off now. I should think about eight names. Say three Society, three Artistic and Literary, and two Naval Military and Political. Perhaps two Society would be enough.

Marion: Yes, dear. (*Beginning to make for the door.*) Will there be anything else you'll want? (*Holding out the paper.*) After I've done this?

William: (*Considering.*) No. . . . no . . . . I'm coming with you. (*Taking out his keys.*) I must get the port. (*William opens the door for her and they go out together.*)

(*The room is empty for a moment, and then Isobel comes in. She is nearly forty. You can see how lovely she was at twenty, but she gave up being lovely eighteen years ago, said good-bye to Isobel, and became just Nurse. If Blayds wants cheerfulness, she is cheerful; if sympathy, sympathetic; if interest, interested. She is off duty now, and you can see how tired she is. But she has some spiritual comfort, some secret pride to sustain her, and it is only occasionally that the tiredness, the deadness, shows through. She has flowers in her arms, and slowly, thoughtfully, she decks the room for the great man. We see now for a moment, that she is much older than we thought; it is for her own ninetieth birthday that she is decorating the room . . . . Now she has finished, and she sits down, her hands in her lap, waiting, waiting patiently . . . . Some thought brings a wistful smile to her mouth. Yes, she must have been very lovely at twenty. Then Royce comes in.*)

Royce: Oh, I beg your pardon. (*He sees who it is.*) Oh!

Isobel: It's all right, I—Are you waiting to see— (*She recognises him.*) Oh!

(*They stand looking at each other, about six feet apart, not moving, saying nothing. Then very gently he begins to hum the refrain of*

a waltz. You can see that she is remembering.)

Isobel: How long ago was it?

Royce: Eighteen years.

Isobel: (*Who has lived fifty years since then.*) So little?

Royce: (*Distressed.*) Isobel!

Isobel: (*Remembering his name now.*) Austin.

Royce: It comes back to you?

Isobel: A few faded memories—and the smell of the pine woods. And there was a band, wasn't there? That was the waltz they played. *How* did it go?

(*He gives her a bar or two again.*)

(*She nods.*) Yes. (*She whispers the tune to herself.*) Why does that make me think of—Didn't you cut your wrist? On the rocks?

Royce: You remember? (*He holds out his wrist.*) Look!

Isobel: (*Nodding.*) I knew that came into it. I tied it up for you.

Royce: (*Sentimentally.*) I have the handkerchief still. (*More honestly.*) Somewhere . . . I know I have it. (*He tries to think where it would be.*)

Isobel: There was a dog, wasn't there?

Royce: How well you remember. Rags. A fox terrier.

Isobel: (*Doubtfully.*) Yes?

Royce: Or was that later? I had an Aberdeen before that.

Isobel: Yes, that was it, I think.

Royce: Thomas.

Isobel: (*Smiling.*) Thomas. Yes . . . Only eighteen little years ago. But what worlds away. Just

give me that tune again. (*He gives it to her.*) You had a pipe you were very proud of—with a cracked bowl—and a silver band to keep it together. What silly things one remembers . . . you'd forgotten it.

Royce: I remember that pink cotton dress.

Isobel: Eighty years ago. Or is it only eighteen? And now we meet again. You married? I seem to remember hearing.

Royce: (*Uncomfortably.*) Yes.

Isobel: I hope it was happy.

Royce: No. We separated.

Isobel: I am sorry.

Royce: Was it likely it would be?

Isobel: (*Surprised.*) Was that all the chance of happiness you gave her?

Royce: You think I oughtn't to have married?

Isobel: Oh, my dear, who am I to order people's lives?

Royce: You ordered mine.

Isobel: But you *have* been happy? Marriage isn't everything. You have been happy in your work, in your books, in your friends?

Royce: (*After thinking.*) Yes, Isobel, on the whole, yes.

Isobel: I'm glad . . . (*She holds out her hand suddenly with a smile.*) How do you do, Mr. Royce? (*She is inviting him to step off the sentimental footing.*)

Royce: (*Stepping off.*) How do you do, Miss Blayds. It's delightful to meet you again.

Isobel: Let's sit down, shall we?

(*They sit down together.*)

My Father will be coming in directly. You are here to see him, of course?

Royce: Yes. Tell me about him—or rather about yourself. You are still looking after him?

Isobel: Yes.

Royce: For eighteen years.

Isobel: Nearly twenty altogether.

Royce: And has it been worth it?

Isobel: He has written wonderful things in those twenty years. Not very much, but very wonderful.

Royce: Yes, that has always been the miracle about him, the way he has kept his youth. And the fire and spirit of youth. You have helped him there.

Isobel: (*Proudly.*) Has it been worth it?

Royce: (*Puzzled.*) I don't know. It's difficult to say. The world would think so; but I—naturally I am prejudiced.

Isobel: Yes.

Royce: (*Smiling.*) You might have looked after *me* for those eighteen years.

Isobel: Did you want it as much as he? (*As he protests.*) No, I don't mean "want" it—*need* it.

Royce: Well, that's always the problem, isn't it—whether the old or the young have the better right to be selfish. We both needed you, in different ways. You gave yourself to him, and he has wasted your life, I don't think *I* should have wasted it.

Isobel: I am proud to have helped him. No one will know. Everything which he wrote will be his. Only *I* shall know how much of it was mine. Well, that's something. Not wasted.

Royce: Sacrificed.

Isobel: Am I to regret that?

Royce? Do you regret it?

Isobel: (*After considering.*) When you asked me to marry you I—I couldn't. He was an old man then; he wanted me, I was everything to him. Oh, he has had his friends, more friends than any man, but he had to be the head of a family too, and without me —I've kept him alive, active. He has sharpened his brains on me. (*With a shrug.*) On whom else?

Royce: Yes, I understand that.

Isobel: You wouldn't have married me and come to live with us all, as Marion and William have done?

Royce: No, no, that's death.

Isobel: Yes, I knew you felt like that. But I couldn't leave him.

(*Royce shrugs his shoulders unconvinced.*)

Oh, I *did* love you then, I *did* want to marry you! But I couldn't. He wasn't just an ordinary man—you must remember that, please. He was Blayds . . . . . Oh, what are we in the world for but to find beauty, and who could find it as he, and who could help him as I?

Royce: I was ready to wait.

Isobel: Ah, but how could we? Until he died! Every day you would be thinking, "I wonder how he is today," and I should be knowing that you were thinking that. Oh, horrible! Sitting and waiting for his death.

Royce: (*Thoughtfully, recognising her point of view.*) Yes . . . Yes . . . But if you were back now, knowing what you know, would you do it again?

Isobel: I think so. I think it has been worth it. It isn't fair to ask me. I'm glad now that I have given him those eighteen years, but perhaps I should have been afraid of it if I had known it was to be as long

as that. It has been trying, of course—such a very old man in body, although so young in mind—but it has not been for an old man that I have done it; not for a selfish Father; but for the glorious young poet who has never grown up, and who wanted me.

Royce: (*Looking into her soul.*) But you have had your bad moments.

Isobel: (*Distressed.*) Oh, don't! It isn't fair.

(*Royce, his eyes still on her, begins the refrain again.*)

Isobel: (*Smiling sadly.*) Oh, no, Mr. Royce! That's all over. I'm an old woman now.

Royce: (*Rather ashamed.*) I'm sorry . . . Yes, you're older now.

Isobel: Twenty and thirty-eight—there's a world of difference between them.

Royce: I'm forty.

Isobel: (*Smiling.*) Don't ask me to pity you. What's forty to a man?

Royce: You're right. In fact I'm masquerading here today as one of the younger writers.

Isobel: Father likes to feel that he is admired by the younger writers. So if you've brought all their signatures with you, he'll be pleased to see you, Mr. Royce. I had better give you just one word of warning. Don't be too hard on the 1863 volume.

Royce: I shan't even mention it.

Isobel: But if *he* does—? It has been attacked so much that he has a sort of mother love for it now, and even I feel protective towards it, and want to say, "Come here, darling, nobody loves you." Say something kind if you can. Of course I know it isn't his best, but when you've been praised as much as he, the

little praise which is with-held is always the praise you want the most.

Royce: How delightfully human that sounds. That is just what I've always felt in my own small way.

(*William comes fussily in.*)

William: Is Mr. Royce—? Ah, there you are! (*Looking round the room.*) You've done the flowers, Isobel? That's right. Well, Mr. Royce, I hope they've been looking after you properly.

Royce: Oh, yes, thanks.

William: That's right. Isobel, (*Looking at his watch*)—in five minutes shall we say?

Isobel: Yes.

William: How is he just now?

Isobel: He seems better today.

William: That's right. We shall drink the health in here.

Isobel: Very well.

(*She goes out.*)

William: A little custom we have, Mr. Royce.

Royce: Oh, yes.

William: We shall all wish him many happy returns of the day—you understand that he isn't dressed now until the afternoon—and then I shall present you. After that we shall all drink the health—you will join us, of course.

Royce: (*Smiling.*) Certainly.

William: Then, of course, it depends how we are feeling. We may feel in the mood for a little talk, or we may be too tired for anything more than a few words of greeting. You have the Address with you?

Royce: Yes. (*Looking about him.*) At least I put it down somewhere.

William: (*Scandalised.*) You put it down—somewhere! My dear Mr. Royce, (*He looks about anxiously*)—at any moment now—(*He looks at his watch.*) Perhaps I'd better—

(*A Maid comes in with the port and glasses.*)

Parsons, have you seen a—(*He makes vague rectangular shapes with his hands.*)

Royce: Here it is.

William: Ah, that's right. (*As the Maid puts the tray down.*) Yes, there I think, Parsons. How many glasses have you brought?

Parsons: Seven, sir.

William: There should be six. One—two—three—

Parsons: Madam said seven, sir.

William: Seven, yes, that's right. When I ring the bell, you'll tell Miss Isobel that we are ready.

Parsons: Yes, sir.

(*She goes out, making way for Marion, Septima and Oliver as she does so.*)

William: Ah, that's right. Now then, let me see . . . I think—Marion, will you sit here? Septima, you there, Oliver—Oliver, that's a very light suit you're wearing.

Oliver: It's a birthday, Father, not a funeral.

William: (*With dignity.*) Yes, but whose birthday? Well, it's too late now—you sit there. Mr. Royce, you sit next to me so that I can take you up. Now are we all ready?

Septima: (*Wickedly.*) Wait a moment. (*She blows her nose.*) Right.

William: All ready? (*He rings the bell with an air.*)

(*There is a solemn silence of expectation. Then*

Oliver shifts a leg and catches his ankle against Septima's chair.)

Oliver: Damn! Oo! (*He rubs his ankle.*)

William: S'sh!

(*There is another solemn silence and then the Maid opens the door. Blayds in an invalid chair is wheeled in by Isobel. They all stand up. With his long white beard, his still plentiful white hair curling over his ears, Oliver Blayds does indeed "look like somebody." Only his eyes, under their shaggy brows, are still young. Indomitable spirit and humour gleam in them. With all the dignity, majesty even, which he brings to the part, you feel that he realises what great fun it is being Oliver Blayds.*)

Blayds: Good day to you all.

Marion: (*Going forward and kissing his forehead.*) Many happy returns of the day, Father.

Blayds: Thank you, Marion. Happy, I hope; many, I neither expect nor want.

(*William, who is just going forward, stops for a moment to jot this down on his shirt cuff. Then, beckoning to Royce to follow him, he approaches.*)

William: My heartiest congratulations, sir.

Blayds: Thank you, William. When you are ninety, I'll do as much for you.

William: (*Laughing heartily.*) Ha, ha! Very good, sir. May I present Mr. A. L. Royce the well-known critic.

Blayds: (*Looking thoughtfully at Royce.*) We have met before, Mr. Royce?

Royce: At Bournemouth, sir. Eighteen years ago.

Blayds: (*Nodding.*) Yes. I remember.

William: Wonderful, wonderful!

Blayds: (*Holding out his hand.*) Thank you for wasting your time now on an old man. You must stay and talk to me afterwards.

Royce: It's very kind of you, sir. I——

William: Just a moment, Mr. Royce. (*He indicates Septima and Oliver.*)

Royce: Oh, I beg your pardon. (*He steps on one side.*)

William: (*In a whisper.*) Septima.

Septima: (*Coming forward.*) Congratulations, Grandfather. (*She bends her head, and he kisses her.*)

Blayds: Thank you, my dear. I don't know what I've done, but thank you.

Oliver: (*Coming forward.*) Congratulations, Grandfather. (*He bends down and Blayds puts a hand on his head.*)

Blayds: Thank you, my boy, thank you. (*Wistfully.*) I was your age once.

(*William who has been very busy pouring out port now gets busy distributing it. When they are all ready he holds up his glass.*)

William: Are we all ready?

(*They are.*)

Blayds!

All: Blayds!

(*They drink.*)

Blayds: (*Moved as always by this.*) Thank you, thank you. (*Recovering himself.*) Is that the Jubilee port, William?

William: Yes, sir.

Blayds: (*Looking wistfully at Isobel.*) May I?

Isobel: Yes, dear, if you like. William——

William: (*Anxiously.*) Do you think—? (*She nods and he pours out a glass.*) Here you are, sir.

Blayds: (*Taking it in rather a shaky hand.*) Mr. Royce, I will drink to you; and, through you, to all that eager youth which is seeking, each in his own way, for beauty. (*He raises his glass.*) May they find it at the last! (*He drinks.*)

Royce: Thank you very much, sir. I shall remember.

William: Allow me, sir. (*He recovers Blayds' glass.*) Marion, you have business to attend to? Oliver—? Septima—?

Marion: Yes, dear. (*Cheerfully to Blayds.*) We're going now, Grandfather.

Blayds: (*Nodding.*) I shall talk a little to Mr. Royce.

Marion: That's right, dear, don't tire yourself. Come along, children.

(*Oliver comes along. Septima hesitates. She "means to have it out this time."*)

Septima: (*Irresolutely.*) Grandfather——

Blayds: Well?

Marion: Come along, dear.

Septima: (*Over-awed by the majesty of Blayds.*) Oh—all right.

(*The Three of them go out.*)

William: (*In a whisper to Royce.*) The Address? (*To Blayds.*) Mr. Royce has a message of congratulation from some of the younger writers, which he wishes to present to you, sir. Mr. Royce——

(*Royce comes forward with it.*)

Blayds: It is very good of them.

Royce: (*Doubtfully.*) Shall I read it, sir?

Blayds: (*Smiling.*) The usual thing?

Royce: (*Smiling too.*) Pretty much. A little better than usual, I hope, because I wrote it.

(*William is now at the writing-table, waiting hopefully for crumbs.*)

Blayds: (*Holding out his hand.*) Give it to me. And sit down, please. Near me. I don't hear too well. (*He takes the book and glances at it.*) Pretty. (*He glances at some of the names and says, with a pleased smile.*) I didn't think they took any interest in an old man. Isobel, you will read it to me afterwards, and tell me who they all are?

Isobel: Yes, dear.

Blayds: Will that do, Mr. Royce?

Royce: Of course, sir . . . I should just like you to know, to have the privilege of telling you here, and on this day, that every one of us there has a very real admiration for your work and a very real reverence for yourself. And we feel that in signing, we have done honour to ourselves, rather than honour to Blayds, whom no words of ours can honour as his own have done.

Blayds: Thank you . . . You must read it to me, Isobel. (*He gives her the book.*) A very real admiration for *all* my work, Mr. Royce?

Royce: Yes, sir.

Blayds: Except the 1863 volume?

Royce: I have never regretted that, sir.

Blayds: (*Pleased.*) Ah! You hear, Isobel?

Royce: I don't say that it is my own favourite, but I could quite understand if it were the author's. There are things about it——

Blayds: Isobel, are you listening?

Isobel: (*Smiling.*) Yes, Father.

Royce: Things outside your usual range, if I may say so——

Blayds: (*Nodding and chuckling.*) You hear, Isobel? Didn't I always tell you? Well, well, we mustn't talk any more about that . . . William!

William: (*Jumping up.*) Sir?

Blayds: What are you doing?

William: Just finishing off a few letters, sir.

Blayds: Would you be good enough to bring me my Sordello.

William: The one which Browning gave you, sir?

Blayds: Of course. I wish to show Mr. Royce the inscription—(*To Royce.*)—an absurd one, all rhymes to Blayds. It will be in the library somewhere, it may have got moved.

William: Certainly, sir.

Isobel: Father——

Blayds: (*Holding up a hand to stop her.*) Thank you, William.

(*William goes out.*)

You were saying, Isobel?

Isobel: Nothing. I thought it was in your bedroom. I was reading to you last night.

Blayds: (*Sharply.*) Of course it's in my bedroom. But can't I get my son-in-law out of the room if I want to?

Isobel: (*Soothingly.*) Of course, dear. It was silly of me.

Blayds: My son-in-law, Mr. Royce, meditates after my death a little book called "Blaydsiana." He hasn't said so, but I see it written all over him. In addition,

you understand, to the official life in two volumes. There may be another one called "On the Track of Blayds in the Cotswolds" but I am not certain of this yet. (*He chuckles to himself.*)

Isobel: (*Reproachfully.*) Father!

Blayds: (*Apologetically.*) All right, Isobel. Mr. Royce won't mind.

Isobel: (*Smiling reluctantly.*) It's very unkind.

Blayds: (*After chuckling to himself again.*) You never knew Whistler, Mr. Royce?

Royce: No, sir, he was a bit before my time.

Blayds: Ah, he was the one to say unkind things. But you forgave him because he had a way with him. And there was always the hope that when he had finished with *you,* he would say something still worse about one of your friends. (*He chuckles to himself again.*) I sent him a book of mine once—which one was it, Isobel?

Isobel: Helen.

Blayds: Helen, yes. I got a postcard from him a few days later, "Dear Oliver, rub it out and do it again." Well, I happened to meet him the next day, and I said that I was sorry I couldn't take his advice, as it was too late now to do anything about it. "Yes," said Jimmie, "as God said when he'd made Swinburne."

Isobel: You've heard that, Mr. Royce?

Royce: No. Ought I to have?

Isobel: It has been published.

Blayds: (*Wickedly.*) I told my son-in-law. Anything which I tell my son-in-law is published.

Isobel: (*To Royce.*) I always say that Father made it up.

Blayds: You didn't know Jimmie, my dear. There

was nothing he couldn't have said. But a most stimulating companion.

Royce: Yes, he must have been.

Blayds: So was Alfred. He had a great sense of humour. All of us who knew him well knew that.

Royce: It is curious how many people nowadays regard Tennyson as something of a prig, with no sense of humour. I always feel that his association with Queen Victoria had something to do with it. A court poet is so very un-stimulating.

Blayds: I think you're right. It was a pity. (*He chuckles to himself. Royce waits expectantly.*) I went to Court once.

Royce: (*Surprised.*) You?

Blayds: (*Nodding.*) Yes, I went to Osborne to see the Queen. Alfred's doing I always suspected, but he wouldn't own to it. (*He chuckles.*)

Isobel: Tell him about it, dear.

Blayds: I had a new pair of boots. They squeaked. They squeaked all the way from London to the Isle of Wight. The Queen was waiting for me at the end of a long room. I squeaked in. I bowed. I squeaked my way up to her. We talked. I was not allowed to sit down of course; I just stood shifting from one foot to the other—and squeaking. She said: "Don't you think Lord Tennyson's poetry is very beautiful?" and I squeaked and said, "Damn these boots." A gentleman-in-waiting told me afterwards that it was contrary to etiquette to start a new topic of conversation with Royalty—so I suppose that that is why I have never been asked to Court again.

Isobel: It was your joke, Father, not the gentleman-in-waiting's.

(*Blayds chuckles.*)

Royce: Yes, I'm sure of that.

Blayds: Isobel knows all my stories . . . When you're ninety, they know all your stories.

Isobel: I like hearing them again, dear, and Mr. Royce hasn't heard them.

Blayds: I'll tell you one you *don't* know, Isobel.

Isobel: Not you.

Blayds: Will you bet?

Isobel: It's taking your money.

Blayds: Mr. Royce will hold the stakes. A shilling.

Isobel: You will be ruined. (*She takes out her purse.*)

Blayds: (*Childishly.*) Have you got one for me too?

Isobel: (*Taking out two.*) One for you and one for me. Here you are, Mr. Royce.

Royce: Thank you. Both good ones? Right.

Blayds: George Meredith told me this. Are you fond of cricket, Mr. Royce?

Royce: Yes, very.

Blayds: So was Meredith, so was I . . . A young boy playing for his school. The important match of the year; he gets his colours only if he plays—you understand? Just before the game began, he was sitting in one of those—what do they call them—deck chairs, when it collapsed, his hand between the hinges. Three crushed fingers; no chance of playing; no colours. At that age a tragedy; it seems that one's whole life is over. You understand?

Royce: Yes. Oh, very well.

Blayds: But if once the match begins with him, he has his colours, whatever happens afterwards. So he decides to say nothing about the fingers. He keeps his

hand in his pocket; nobody has seen the accident, nobody guesses. His side is in first. He watches—his hand in his pocket. When his turn comes to bat he forces a glove over the crushed fingers and goes to the wickets. He makes nothing—well, that doesn't matter, he is the wicket-keeper and has gone in last. But he knows now that he can never take his place in the field; and he knows too what an unfair thing he has done to his school to let them start their game with a cripple. It is impossible now, to confess . . . So, in between the innings, he arranges another accident with his chair, and falls back on it, with his fingers—his already crushed fingers this time—in the hinges. So nobody ever knew. Not until he was a man, and it all seemed very little and far away.

Isobel: What a horrible story! Give him the money, Mr. Royce.

Blayds: Keep it for me, Isobel.

(*Isobel takes it.*)

Royce: Is it true, sir?

Blayds: So Meredith said. He told me.

Royce: Lord, what pluck! I think I should have forgiven him for that.

Blayds: Yes, an unfair thing to do, but having done it, he carried it off in the grand manner.

Isobel: To save himself.

Blayds: Well, well. But he had qualities. Don't you think so, Mr. Royce?

Royce: I do indeed.

(*There is a silence. The excitement of the occasion has died away, and you can almost see Blayds getting older.*)

Blayds: (*After a pause.*) I could tell you another

story, Isobel, which you don't know . . . Of another boy who carried it off.

Isobel: Not now, dear. You mustn't tire yourself.

Blayds: (*A very old man suddenly.*) No, not now. But I shall tell you one day. Yes, I shall have to tell you . . . I shall have to tell you.

Isobel: (*Quietly to Royce.*) I think perhaps——

Royce: (*Getting up.*) It is very kind of you to have seen me, sir. I mustn't let you get tired of me.

Blayds: (*Very tired.*) God-bye, Mr. Royce. He liked the 1863 volume, Isobel.

Isobel: Yes, Father.

Royce: Good-bye, sir, and thank you, I shall always remember.

Isobel: (*In a whisper to Royce.*) You can find your way out, can't you? I don't like to leave him.

Royce: Of course. I may see you again?

Isobel: (*Tired.*) I am always here.

Royce: Good-bye.

(*He goes.*)

Blayds: Isobel, where are you?

Isobel: (*At his side again.*) Here I am, dear.

Blayds: How old did you say I was?

Isobel: Ninety.

Blayds: Ninety . . . I'm tired.

Isobel: It has been too much for you, dear, I oughtn't to have let him stay so long. You'd like to go to bed now, wouldn't you? (*She walks away to ring the bell.*)

Blayds: (*A frightened child.*) Where are you going? Don't leave me.

Isobel: (*Stopping.*) Only to ring the bell, dear.

Blayds: Don't leave me. I want you to hold my hand.

Isobel: Yes, dear. (*She holds it.*)

Blayds: Did you say I was ninety? There's no going back at ninety. Only forward—into the grave that's waiting for you. So cold and lonely there, Isobel.

Isobel: I am always with you, dear.

Blayds: Hold me tight. I'm frightened . . . Did I tell you about the boy—who carried it off?

Isobel: Yes, dear, you told us.

Blayds: No, not that boy—the other one. Are we alone, Isobel?

Isobel: Yes, dear.

Blayds: Listen, Isobel. I want to tell——

Isobel: Tell me tomorrow, dear.

Blayds: (*In weak anger, because he is frightened.*) There are no tomorrows when you are ninety . . . when you are ninety . . . and they have all left you . . . alone.

Isobel: (*Soothingly.*) Very well, dear. Tell me now.

Blayds: (*Eagerly.*) Yes, yes, come closer . . . Listen, Isobel. (*He draws her still closer and begins.*) Isobel . . .

(*But we do not hear it until afterwards.*)

ACT II

Scene: The same room a few days later.
Oliver comes in dressed in the deepest black, having just returned from the funeral of Oliver Blayds. He looks round the room and then up at the old gentleman who has now left it forever, and draws his first deep breath of freedom. Then sitting at his ease on the sofa he takes out a cigarette and lights it.

Oliver: (*Blowing out smoke.*) Ah!

(*Septima, also of course in mourning, comes in.*)

Septima: (*Seeing the cigarette.*) Hullo!

Oliver: (*A little on the defensive.*) Hullo!

Septima: I think I'll join you. Got one?

Oliver: I expect so. (*He offers her one.*)

Septima: Thanks. (*He lights it for her.*) Thanks. (*She also takes her first deep breath.*) Well, that's that.

Oliver: What did you think of it?

Septima: It's rather awful, isn't it? I mean awe-inspiring.

Oliver: Yes. I don't know why it should be. Did you cry? You looked like it once or twice.

Septima: Yes. Not because it was Grandfather. Not because it was Oliver Blayds. But—just because.

Oliver: Because it was the last time.

Septima: Yes . . . I suppose that's why one cries

at weddings. Or at—no, I've never been to a christening.

Oliver: You have. And I bet you cried.

Septima: Oh, my own, yes . . .

Oliver: Wonderful crowd of people. I don't think I ever realised before what a great man he was.

Septima: No, one doesn't . . .

Oliver: (*After a pause.*) You know there's a lot of rot talked about death.

Septima: A lot of rot talked about everything.

Oliver: Here was Oliver Blayds—the greatest man of his day—seen everything, known everybody, ninety years old, honoured by all—and then he goes out. Well!

Septima: Nothing is here for tears, in fact.

Oliver: Not only nothing for tears, but everything for rejoicings. I don't understand these religious people. They're quite certain that there's an after life, and that this life is only a preparation for it—like a cold bath in the morning to the rest of the day. And yet they are always the people who make the most fuss, and cover themselves with black, and say, "Poor grandfather" ever after. Why poor? He is richer than ever according to them.

Septima: Can't you *see* Oliver Blayds in Heaven enjoying it all? What poetry he would make of it!

Oliver: "A Child's Thoughts on Waking"—eh? I've laughed at it, and loathed it, but it was the real stuff, you know. What's the text—"Except ye be born again as a little child, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"—is that right? *His* thoughts— on waking in Heaven.

Septima: (*Thoughtfully.*) Septima Blayds-Conway. It's rather a thing to be, you know.

Oliver: I used to think once that when the old boy died, I'd chuck the Blayds and just be plain Oliver Conway. I'm beginning to think I was wrong . . . Oliver Blayds-Conway.

Septima: The well-known statesman. Sorry, I mean engineer.

Oliver: Well, I wonder about that.

Septima: What sort of wondering?

Oliver: Things will be a bit different now. I'm the only genuine Blayds left——

Septima: Oh, indeed!

Oliver: You know what I mean, male Blayds. And it's rather up to me not to let the old man down. Oliver Blayds-Conway M. P. There's something in it, you know. I was thinking about it in the Church. Or should I drop the Conway and just be Blayds. Or Conway Blayds and drop the Oliver? It's a bit of a problem.

Septima: I shall keep the Blayds when I marry. Drop the Conway, of course.

Oliver: It's a dirty game, politics, but that's all the more reason why there should be some really good people in it. Irreproachable people, I mean. Conway Blayds . . .(*And the Duke of Devonshire, and so forth.*)

Septima: (*After a pause.*) I wonder what Aunt Isobel wants to talk to us all about.

Oliver: The old man's last dying instructions or something. I was rather hoping to get down to the Oval. I've got the day off. Bit of a change to go to the Oval when you really have buried your Grandfather. But perhaps I ought to be careful if I'm going in seriously for politics.

Septima: Noll, have you realised that it's all going to be rather interesting now?

Oliver: Of course it is. But why particularly?

Septima: Father.

Oliver: You mean he's lost his job.

Septima: Yes. It's terribly exciting when your Father's out of work.

Oliver: He'll have more work than ever. He'll write Blayds' life. That'll take him years.

Septima: Yes, but, don't you see, he hasn't any real standing now. Who is he? Only Blayds' late secretary. Whose house is this now, do you think?

Oliver: Depends how the old man left it.

Septima: Of course it does. But you can be quite sure he didn't leave it to Father. I think it's all going to be rather exciting.

Oliver: Well, you won't be here to see it, my child.

Septima: Why not?

Oliver: I thought you were going to live with that Ferguson girl.

Septima: Not so sure now. There's no hurry anyway. I think I'll wait here a bit, and see what happens. It's all going to be so different.

Oliver: It is. (*He smiles at his thoughts.*)

Septima: What?

Oliver: (*Smiling broadly.*) It's just on the cards that it's my house now. (*Looking round the room.*) I don't think I shall let Father smoke in here.

Septima: What fun that would be . . . I hope he's left Aunt Isobel something.

Oliver: Yes, poor dear, she's rather in the air, isn't she?

Septima: It's funny how little we know *her.*

Oliver: We've hardly ever seen her, apart from the old man. I don't suppose there's much to know. A born nurse and that's all there is to it.

Septima: Perhaps you're right.

Oliver: I'm sure I am.

(*William and Marion come on.*)

William: (*Continuing a conversation which has obviously been going on since Blayds died.*) I say again, Oliver Blayds ought to have been buried in the Abbey. The nation expected it. The nation had the right to it.

Marion: Yes, dear, but we couldn't go against his own wish. His last wish.

William: If it was his wish, why did he not express it to me?

Marion: He told Isobel, dear.

William: So we are to believe. And of course I was careful to let the public understand that this was so in my letter to the *Times*. But in what circumstances did he express the wish? (*He suddenly realises Oliver's cigarette and says sharply*—) Oliver, you know quite well that your Grandfather—(*But then he remembers where Grandfather is.*)

Oliver: (*Not understanding.*) Yes?

Marion: I think Father meant—Of course Grandfather can't see you now—not to mind.

William: I should have thought your instinct would have told you that this is hardly the moment, when Oliver Blayds is just laid to rest——

Marion: Your cigarette, dear.

Oliver: Oh! (*He throws it away.*) Sorry, Mother, if you mind. I didn't think it would matter either way—now.

Marion: That's all right, dear.

William: As I was saying, in what circumstances did he express the wish?

Marion: What, dear?

William: On his death-bed, his faculties rapidly going, he may have indicated preference for a simple ceremony. But certainly up to a few weeks of his passing, although it was naturally a subject which I did not care myself to initiate, he always gave me the impression that he anticipated an interment in the Abbey.

Marion: Yes, dear. I daresay I shall feel it more later, but just now I like to think of him where he wanted to be himself.

Septima: After all, Shakespeare isn't buried in the Abbey.

William: I don't think that that has anything to do with it, Septima. I am not saying that the reputation of Oliver Blayds will suffer by reason of his absence from the national Valhalla; he has built his own monument in a thousand deathless lines; but speaking as an Englishman, I say that the Abbey had a right to him.

Marion: Well, it's too late now, dear.

William: I shall speak to Isobel again; I still feel sure she was mistaken.

Marion: Very well, dear. But don't worry her more than you need. I feel rather uneasy about her. She has been so strange since he died.

William: She will be worried enough as it is. Of all the extraordinary wills to make!

(*Oliver and Septima exchange glances.*)

Oliver: Why, what's he done? We were wondering about that.

William: Yes, yes, yes, you will know in good time, my boy.

Oliver: Why not now? This seems a very good time.

Septima: Are we too young to be told?

William: (*Ignoring them.*) Marion, don't let me forget that message to the public—returning thanks for their sympathy and so on. (*Moving to the desk.*) We might draft that now.

Marion: Yes, dear.

Septima: Oliver was asking you about the will, Father.

William: Yes, yes, another time. Marion——

Oliver: I suppose I am mentioned in it?

William: Of course, of course.

Oliver: To what extent?

(*William is too busy to answer.*)

Septima: Father, don't be so childish.

William: (*Outraged.*) Septima!

Marion: Septima dear, you oughtn't to talk to your father like that.

William: (*With dignity.*) I think you had better go to your room.

Septima: (*Unmoved.*) But that's the whole point. Is it my room?

(*William looks bewildered.*)

Or is it Oliver's, or Mother's, or Aunt Isobel's?

Oliver: I believe he has left everything to Aunt Isobel.

Marion: Oh, no, dear, he wouldn't do that. He would never have favourites. Share and share alike.

Septima: Half for you and half for Aunt Isobel?

Marion: Of course, dear. And all to you and Oliver after our death. And something down to you now. I forget how much. (*To William.*) What was it, dear?

William: (*Sulkily.*) A thousand pounds each.

Oliver: Sportsman! What about you, Father? Do you get anything?

Marion: Father gets a thousand, too.

Septima: Then why "of all the extraordinary wills—"?

Marion: It's because of Aunt Isobel being made sole executor—literary executor too—isn't that it, dear?

William: (*Mumbling.*) Yes.

Oliver: Oho! Meaning that *she* runs Blayds now? New editions, biographies, unpublished fragments, and all the rest of it?

Marion: Naturally she will leave it in Father's hands. But of course Father is a little hurt that Grandfather didn't think of that for himself.

Oliver: Oh well, I don't suppose it matters much. Then that's why she wants to see us all now.

(*William grunts assent; and stands up as Isobel comes in.*)

William: Ah, here you are.

Isobel: I'm sorry if I have kept you waiting.

Marion: It's all right, dear.

William: I was just telling Marion that I am more than ever convinced that Oliver Blayds' rightful resting place was the Abbey.

Isobel: (*Shaking her head wearily.*) No.

William: I was saying to Marion, even if he ex-

pressed the wish in his last moments for a quiet interment——

Isobel: He never expressed the wish, one way or the other.

William: My dear Isobel! You distinctly told us——

Marion: You did say, dear.

Isobel: Yes, I owe you an apology about that.

William: (*Indignantly.*) An apology!

Isobel: There is something I have to tell you all. Will you please listen, all of you? Won't you sit down, William?

(*They sit down.*)

Marion: What is it, dear?

William: You've been very mysterious these last few days.

Isobel: I didn't want to say anything until he had been buried. I shall not be mysterious now; I shall be only too plain.

Septima: (*To Oliver.*) I say, what's up?

(*Oliver shrugs his shoulders.*)

William: Well?

Isobel: I told you that Father didn't want to be buried in the Abbey, not because he had said so, but because it was quite impossible that he should be buried in the Abbey.

William: Impossible!

Marion: I'm sure the Dean would have been only—

Isobel: Impossible because he had done nothing to make him worthy of that honour.

William: Well!

Oliver: Oh no, Aunt Isobel, you're wrong there. I mean when you think of some of the people——

Isobel: Will you listen to me, please? And ask any questions afterwards. You may think I'm mad; I'm not . . . I wish I were.

William: Well, what is it?

(*She tells them; it is almost as if she were repeating a lesson which she had learnt by heart. Blayds, you may be sure, made a story of it when he told her—we seem to hear snatches of that story now.*)

Isobel: Nearly seventy years ago there were two young men, boys almost, twenty-three perhaps, living together in rooms in Islington. Both poor, both eager, ambitious, certain of themselves, very certain of their destiny. But only one of them was a genius. He was a poet, this one; perhaps the greater poet because he knew that he had not long to live. As the lark sings, so he sang. The poetry came bubbling out of him, and he wrote it down feverishly, quick, quick before the hand became cold and the fingers could no longer write. That was all his ambition. He had no thoughts of present fame; there was no time for it. He was content to live unknown, so that when dead he might live forever. His friend was ambitious in a different way. He wanted the present delights of fame. So they lived together there, one writing and writing, always writing; the other writing and then stopping to think how famous he was going to be, and envying those who were already famous, and then regretfully writing again. A time came when the poet grew very ill, and lay in bed, but still writing, but still hurrying, hurrying to keep pace with the divine music in his brain. Then one day there was no more writing, no more music. The poet was dead. (*She is silent for a little.*)

William: (*As her meaning slowly comes to him.*) Isobel, what are you saying?

Marion: I don't understand. Who was it?

Oliver: Good Lord!

Isobel: (*In the same quiet voice.*) The friend was left—with the body of the poet—and all that great monument which the dead man had raised for himself. The poet had no friends but this one; no relations of whom he had ever spoken or who claimed him now. He was dead, and it was left to his friend to see that he won now that immortality for which he had given his life . . . His friend betrayed him.

Septima: I say!

William: I *won't* believe it! It's monstrous!

Marion: I don't understand.

Isobel: (*Wearily.*) One can see the temptation. There he was, this young man of talent, of great ambition, and there were these works of genius lying at his feet, waiting to be picked up—and fathered by him. I suppose that, like every other temptation, it came suddenly. He writes out some of the verses, scribbled down anyhow by the poet in his mad hurry, and sends them to the publisher; one can imagine the publisher's natural acceptance of the friend as the true author, the friend's awkwardness in undeceiving him, and then his sudden determination to make the most of the opportunity given him . . . Oh, one can imagine many things—but what remains? Always and always this. That Oliver Blayds was not a poet; that he did not write the works attributed to him; and that he betrayed his friend. (*She stops and then says in an ordinary matter of fact voice.*) That was why I thought that he ought not to be buried in the Abbey.

Oliver: Good Lord!

William: (*Sharply.*) Is this true, Isobel?

Isobel: It isn't the sort of story that I should make up.

Marion: I don't understand. (*To William.*) What is it? I don't understand.

William: Isobel is telling us that Oliver Blayds stole all his poetry from another man.

Marion: Stole it!

William: Passed it off as his own.

Marion: (*Firmly to Isobel.*) Oh no, dear, you must be wrong. Why should Grandfather want to steal anybody else's poetry when he wrote so beautifully himself?

Septima: That's just the point, Mother. Aunt Isobel says that he didn't write anything himself.

Marion: But there are the books with his name on them!

Isobel: Stolen—from his friend.

Marion: (*Shocked.*) Isobel, how can you? Your own father!

William: I don't believe it. I had the privilege of knowing Oliver Blayds for nearly thirty years and I say that I don't believe it.

Isobel: I knew him for some time too. He was my father.

William: When did he tell you this?

Oliver: It's a dashed funny thing that——

William: If you will allow me, Oliver. I want to get to the bottom of this. When did he tell you?

Isobel: That last evening. His birthday.

William: How? Why? Why should he tell you?

Isobel: He seemed frightened suddenly—of dying. I suppose he'd always meant to tell somebody before he died.

Marion: Why didn't you tell us before, dear?

William: (*Holding up his hand.*) Please. Let me. (*To Isobel.*) Why didn't you tell us before?

Isobel: I promised not to say anything until he was dead. Then I thought I would wait until he was buried.

Marion: You couldn't have made a mistake? You couldn't have misunderstood him?

Isobel: (*Smiling sadly.*) No.

William: You say that this other man died—how many years ago?

Isobel: Sixty, seventy.

William: Ah! (*Sarcastically.*) And sixty years after he was dead, he was apparently still writing poetry for Oliver Blayds to steal?

Isobel: He had already written it—sixty years ago —for Oliver Blayds to steal.

Oliver: Good Lord! What a man!

Septima: You mean that his last volume——

William: (*Holding up his hand.*) Please Septima . . . Take this last volume published when he was over eighty. You say that everything there had been written by this other man sixty years ago?

Isobel: Yes.

William: And the manuscripts were kept by Oliver Blayds for sixty years, written out again by him and published in his old age as his own?

Isobel: Yes.

William: (*Triumphantly.*) And can you explain how it was that he didn't publish them earlier if he had had them in his possession all those years?

Isobel: He didn't dare to. He was afraid of being left with nothing to publish. He took care always to

have something in reserve. And that's why everybody said how wonderfully vigorous and youthful his mind was at eighty, how amazing that the spirit and fire of youth had remained with him so long. Yes, it was the spirit and fire of youth, but of a youth who died seventy years ago.

Oliver: (*Impressed.*) Gad, you know, fancy the old chap keeping it up like that. Shows how little one really knows people. I had no idea he was such a sportsman.

Septima: Such a liar.

Oliver: Same thing, sometimes.

Septima: I call it perfectly disgusting.

William: Please, please! We shan't arrive at the truth like that. (*To Isobel.*) You want me to understand that Oliver Blayds has never written a line of his own poetry in his life?

Marion: Why, Grandfather was always writing poetry. Even as a child I remember——

Septima: (*Impatiently.*) Mother, can't you understand that the Oliver Blayds we thought we knew never existed?

Marion: But I was telling you, dear, that even as a child——

Septima: (*To Oliver.*) It's no good, she's hopelessly muddled.

William: Yes, yes . . . Do you wish me to understand——

Isobel: I wish you to know the truth. We've been living in a lie, all of us, all our lives, and now at last we have found the truth. You talk as if, for some reason, I wanted to spread slanders about Oliver Blayds now that he is dead; as if in some way all this great

lie were my doing; as if it were no pain but a sort of a pleasure to me to find out what sort of man my father really was. Ask me questions—I want you to know everything; but don't cross examine me as if I were keeping back the truth.

William: (*Upset and apologetic.*) Quite so, quite so. It's the truth which we want.

Marion: As Grandfather said so beautifully himself in his Ode to Truth—What are the lines?

Septima: (*Hopelessly.*) Oh, Mother!

Marion: Yes, and that was what I was going to say—could a man who wrote so beautifully about truth as Grandfather did, tell lies and deceive people as Isobel says he did? (*To Isobel.*) I'm sure you must have made a mistake, dear.

Oliver: You never told us—what was the other fellow's name?

William: I am coming to that directly. What I am asking you now is this. Did Oliver Blayds write no line of poetry himself at all?

Isobel: He wrote the 1863 Volume.

William: (*Staggered.*) Oh!

Oliver: The wash-out? By Jove! Then *that* explains it!

Isobel: Yes, that explains it. He tried to tell himself that he was a poet too; that he had only used the other man in order to give himself a start. So he brought out a volume of his own poems. And then when everybody said "Blayds is finished," he went back hastily to his friend and never ventured by himself again. And that explains why he resented the criticism of that volume, why he was so pleased when it was praised. It was all that he had written.

William: (*Defeated now.*) Yes, that would explain it. (*To himself.*) Oliver Blayds! . . .

(*They are all silent for a little.*)

Septima: Then he didn't write "Septima."

Oliver: Of course he didn't. You're illegitimate, old girl.

Septima: Who did?

Isobel: The other man's name was Jenkins.

Septima: (*In disgust.*) Christened after Jenkins!

Oliver: Oliver Jenkins-Conway M. P., Good Lord!

Septima: It will have to be Oliver Conway now.

Oliver: (*Gloomily.*) Yes, I suppose so. But everybody will know.

William: (*Still fighting.*) His friends, Isobel. The great friends he had had. The stories he has told us about them—were those all lies too? No, they couldn't have been. I've seen them here myself.

Marion: Why, I remember going to see Uncle Thomas once when I was a little girl—Carlyle—Uncle Thomas I called him.

Oliver: Well, if it comes to that, *I* can remember——

Isobel: Oh, the friends were there. They accepted him for what he seemed to be, just as we did. He deceived them as cleverly as he deceived us.

William: Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne——

Isobel: (*Bitterly.*) Oh, he had his qualities. He talked well. There were his books. Why should they doubt him?

William: Yes . . . Yes.

(*There is silence for a little.*)

Marion: (*Going over to Isobel and shaking her by the arm.*) Is it really true what you've been saying?

Isobel: Oh, how I wish it weren't.

Marion: (*To William.*) *Is* it true?

William: He told her. She wouldn't make it up.

Marion: But there's all his beautiful poetry. I've been brought up to believe in it all my life. I've lived on it. And now you've taken him away, and you've left—nothing.

Isobel: Nothing.

Marion: (*Quite lost.*) I don't understand. (*She goes back in a vague, bewildered way to her chair.*)

Septima: (*Suddenly.*) The poetry is still there—and Jenkins.

Oliver: Shut up, Tim!

Septima: Shut up about what?

Oliver: Jenkins. Don't rub it in. It's much worse for Mother than it is for us.

Septima: Oh, all right! But you don't gain anything by not being frank about it.

(*There is another silence.*)

Oliver: Good Lord! I've just thought of something.

(*They look at him.*)

The money.

William: The money?

Oliver: All this. (*He indicates the room.*) Who does it belong to?

William: According to the provisions of your grandfather's will——

Oliver: Yes, but it wasn't his to leave.

William: Not his to——

Oliver: No, Jenkins.

Septima: I thought we weren't going to mention Mr. Jenkins.

Oliver: Shut up, Tim, that's different. (*To the others.*) All this money comes from the books—at least I suppose it does—and the books aren't his, so the money isn't either.

William: (*Turning in a bewildered way to Isobel.*) Is that so?

Isobel: (*With a shrug.*) I suppose so.

William: You say he had no family, this other man.

Isobel: None who bothered about him. But there must be relations somewhere.

William: We shall have to find that out.

Isobel: Anyhow, as Oliver says, the money isn't ours. (*Bitterly.*) I wouldn't touch a penny.

William: Some of the money would be rightfully his. There was that one volume anyhow. It may not have been praised, but it was bought. Then there's the question of his investments. It may prove that some of his most profitable investments were made about that time—with that very money. In which case, if it could be established——

Isobel: (*Indignantly.*) Oh, how can you talk like that! As if it mattered. It's tainted money all of it.

William: I think that's going too far. Very much too far. I recognise of course that we have certain obligations towards the relatives of this man—er—Jenkins. Obviously we must fulfil those obligations. But when that is done——

Marion: (*To Isobel.*) We shall be generous of course, dear, that's only fair.

Oliver: Yes, but what are you going to do if no relations turn up?

William: (*Turning doubtfully to Isobel.*) Well, there is that, of course.

Marion: In that case we couldn't do anything, could we, dear?

Isobel: We could throw the money into the sea, we could bury it deep in the ground, we could even give it away, Marion.

William: That's going much too far.

Oliver: It's rather a problem, you know.

Septima: It isn't a problem at all. May I speak for a moment? I really think I have a right to say something.

William: Well?

Septima: I want to say this. Oliver and I have been brought up in a certain way to expect certain things. Oliver wanted to be an engineer; he wasn't allowed to, as Grandfather wanted him to go into politics. I wanted to share a studio with a friend and try and get on with my painting; I wasn't allowed to, as Grandfather wanted me at home. Perhaps if Oliver had been an engineer, he would have been doing well by now. Perhaps if I had had my way, I might have been earning my living by now. As it is, we have been brought up as the children and grandchildren of rich people; I can't earn my own living, and Oliver is in a profession in which money means success. Aunt Isobel has been telling us how a young man of Oliver's age, seventy years ago, was cheated out of his rights. Apparently she thinks that the best way now of making up for that is to cheat Oliver and me out of our rights. I don't agree with her.

Oliver: Yes, there's a good deal in that. Well done, Tim.

Isobel: It's hard on you, I know. But you are young; you still have your lives in front of you, to make what you will of them.

Septima: That's what old people always say to people of our age, and they seem to think that it excuses any injustice.

Marion: Poor Grandfather!

Septima: Yes, but I don't see why it should be "Poor Oliver" and "Poor Septima" too. Suppose any relation did turn up—(*To William.*)—suppose they do, Father. Well, what will they all be? Grandnephews, or fifth cousins twice removed or something, who have never heard of Jenkins, who never did anything *for* Jenkins, and on whose lives Jenkins has had no effect whatever. Is there any sort of justice which says that they ought to have the money? But Noll and I have given up a good deal for Oliver Blayds, and he owes us something.

Isobel: (*With ironic sadness.*) Oh, yes, you have given up a good deal for Oliver Blayds. It ought to be paid back to you.

William: (*Still trying to be fair.*) There's another thing we must remember. Even if this other man——

Septima: Jenkins.

William: Yes, even if he wrote all the books—always excepting the 1863 volume—even so, it was Oliver Blayds who arranged for their publication. He could fairly claim therefore an agent's commission on all monies received. Ten per cent.

Isobel: (*Scornfully.*) Oliver Blayds, the well-known commission agent!

William: Ten per cent. of all monies, therefore, is in any case rightfully ours.

Marion: Only ten per cent., dear. That seems very little.

William: I am working on a minimum basis. Isobel says, "Throw all the money into the sea; it doesn't be-

long to us." I say no, that is going too far. We have one volume which is certainly ours. We have the ten per cent. commission which is certainly ours. There may be other sums due to us, such as the profits of investments. We can look into the matter carefully at our leisure. The great point, I take it, is that we want to be fair to the relatives of this man Jenkins, but also fair to the relatives of Oliver Blayds. Who, as Septima points out, have at least done something to earn any money that comes to them.

Marion: (*To Isobel.*) We want to be fair to everybody, dear.

Septima: Well, I think you are going to give the Jenkinses much too much. What right have the Jenkinses got to any of the money which Grandfather made by investing?

Oliver: Well, it was Jenkins' money which was invested.

Marion: We shouldn't like to think of them starving because we weren't quite fair.

Septima: They let Jenkins starve. They didn't worry about *him.*

Oliver: Of course they didn't, they weren't even born.

William: The whole question is extremely difficult. We may require an arbitrator, or at any rate a qualified chartered accountant.

Marion: Yes, that would be better, dear. To let somebody else decide what is fair and what isn't.

Isobel: (*In a low voice.*) Oh, it's horrible . . . horrible.

Marion: What, dear?

Isobel: The way you talk—about the money. As if all that we had lost was so much money. As if you

could estimate the wrong that Oliver Blayds did to his friend in the terms of money. I said the money was tainted. It is. How can you bear to touch it? How can you bear to profit by such a betrayal?

Septima: That's pure sentiment, Aunt Isobel. Quite apart from not being reasonable, it isn't even practical. Where are you going to draw the line? If you're going to throw the money away, then you've got to throw the house away and everything in the house away—all our clothes to begin with. Because everything—everything that belongs to us owes itself to that betrayal of seventy years ago . . . We should look very funny, the five of us, walking out from the house tomorrow, with nothing on, and starting life all over again.

Marion: Septima dear, I don't think that's quite—

(*Septima begins to laugh to herself at the picture of them.*)

Oliver: That isn't fair, Tim. An extreme case makes anything seem absurd. (*Earnestly to Isobel.*) You know, I do see what you mean and I do sympathise. But even if we kept all the money, would that matter very much? All this man Jenkins wanted was to leave an immortal name behind him. You've just told us that nothing else interested him. Jenkins —I don't say it's much of a name, but neither was Keats for that matter. Well, Grandfather robbed him of that, and a damned shame too, but now we are giving it back to him. So all that's happened is that he's had seventy years less immortality than he expected. But he can't worry seriously about that, any more than Wordsworth can worry because he was born two hundred years after Shakespeare. They are all equally immortal.

Marion: (*To Isobel.*) You see, dear, that's quite fair to everybody.

Isobel: One can't argue about it; you feel it or you don't. And I give up my share of the money, so there should be plenty for all of you, even after you have been "fair" to the others.

William: (*Who has felt Isobel's scorn deeply.*) Isobel! I don't think you can realise how much you have hurt me by your words. After the first shock of your revelation it has been my one object to keep my real feelings, my very deep feelings under control. I suppose that this revelation, this appalling revelation, has meant more to me than to anyone in this room. Put quite simply, it means the end of my life work, the end of a career . . . I think you know how I devoted myself to Oliver Blayds——

Marion: Simply devoted himself, dear.

William: I gave up whatever other ambitions I may have had——

Marion: (*To the children.*) I always said that Father could have done anything.

William: —And I set myself from that day on to live for one thing only, Oliver Blayds. It was a great pride to me to be his son-in-law, a great pride to be his secretary, but the greatest pride of all was the thought that I was helping others to know aand to love, as I knew and loved him, that very great poet, that very great man, Oliver Blayds. You tell me now that he is—(*He snaps his fingers.*)—nothing. A hollow mask. (*His voice rises.*) I think I have some right to be angry, I think I have some right to bear resentment against this man who has tricked me, who has been making a fool of me for all these years. When I think of the years of labour which I have spent already in getting the materials together for this great man's life; when I think how I have listened to him and taken down eagerly his every word; when I think that tomorrow,

I am to be held up to the derision of the world for the gullible fool I have shown myself to be, I think I have a right to be angry. (*With a great effort he controls himself and goes on more quietly.*) But I have tried to control my feelings. I have remembered that he was your father and Marion's father, and I have tried to control myself. To forget my own feelings, and to consider only how best to clear up this wreckage that Oliver Blayds has left behind. It is not for you to scorn me, me who have been the chief one to suffer.

Marion: Poor Father! (*She puts out a hand.*)

William: (*Patting it.*) That's all right. I don't want pity. I just want Isobel to try to realise what it means to me.

Oliver: Yes, by Jove, it is a bit rough on the governor.

Septima: Rough on all of us.

Marion: But your Father has suffered most. You must always remember that.

Isobel: Poor William! Yes, it is hard on you. Your occupation's gone.

William: It is a terrible blow to us all, this dreadful news that you have given us. But you can understand that to me it is absolutely crushing.

Isobel: (*In a whisper.*) And to me?

(*They look at her in surprise.*)

What has it been to me?

William: Well, as I was saying——

Isobel: You have enjoyed your life here, yes, every moment of it. If you hadn't been secretary to Oliver Blayds, you would have been secretary to somebody else—it's what you're best fitted for. Yes, you have

lived your life; you have had interests, a hundred interests every day to keep you active and eager . . . (*Almost to herself.*) But I say, what of me? What has my life been? Look at me now—what am I—a wasted woman. I might have been a wife, a mother—with a man of my own, children of my own, in my own home. Look at me now . . . !

Marion: My dear, I never dreamt——

Isobel: (*Eighteen years away from them all.*) He asked me to marry him. Tall and straight and clean he was, and he asked me to marry him. Ah, how happy we should have been together he and I—should we not have been happy? He asked me to marry him.

Marion: Isobel!

Isobel: Such a long time ago. I was young then, and pretty then, and the world was very full then of beautiful things. I used to laugh then—we laughed together—such a gay world it was all those years ago. And he asked me to marry him . . . (*In a hard voice.*) I didn't. I sent him away. I said that I must stay with my Father, Oliver Blayds, the great poet. Yes, I was helping the great poet. (*With a bitter laugh.*) Helping! . . . And I sent my man away.

Septima: (*Distressed.*) Oh, don't!

Isobel: You thought I liked nursing. "A born nurse"—I can hear you saying it. (*Fiercely.*) I hated it. Do you know what it's like nursing a sick old man—day after day, night after night? And then year after year. Always a little older, a little more difficult. Do you know what it is to live with an old man when you are young, as I was young once, to live always with old age and never with youth, and to watch your own youth gradually creeping up to join his old age? Ah, but I was doing it for Blayds, for the sake of his immortal poetry. (*She laughs—such a*

laugh.) And look at me now, all wasted. The wife I might have been, the mother I might have been. How beautiful the world was, all those years ago!

(*They say nothing, for there is nothing to say. Isobel looks in front of her seeing nothing. Suddenly a barrel organ begins playing in the street outside, dreamily, wistfully, the waltz of eighteen years ago. Isobel remembers and with a sob, drops her face into her hands. Very gently the others go out, leaving her there with her memories. . .*)

ACT III

Afternoon, three days later. Royce is at the desk, at work on a statement for publication. He has various documents at hand, to which he refers from time to time. Oliver comes in.

Oliver: Hullo!

Royce: (*Without looking up.*) Hullo!

Oliver: (*After waiting hopefully.*) Very busy! (*He sits down.*)

Royce: Yes.

Oliver: Where is everybody?

Royce: About somewhere.

Oliver: Oh! . . . I've been away for a couple of days. My chief made a speech at Bradford. My God! Just for my benefit he dragged in a reference to Oliver Blayds. Also "My God."

Royce: (*Realising suddenly that somebody is talking.*) Oh! (*He goes on with his work.*)

Oliver: Yes, you seem quite excited about it.

Royce: Sorry, but I've really got rather a lot to do, and not too much time to do it in.

Oliver: Oh! . . . You won't mind my asking, but are you living in the house?

Royce: Practically. For the last three days.

Oliver: Oh, I say, are you really? I was being sarcastic—as practised by the best politicians.

Royce: Don't mention it.

Oliver: What's happened?

Royce: Miss Blayds asked me to help her. As you know, she is executor to Blayds. Of course your father is helping too, but there's a good deal to be done.

Oliver: I see. (*Awkwardly.*) I say, I suppose you—I mean has she—I mean, what about——

Royce: Miss Blayds has told me.

Oliver: Oh! Nobody else yet?

Royce: No.

Oliver: I've been rushing for the papers every morning expecting to see something about it.

Royce: We want to get everything in order first—the financial side of it as well as the other—and then make a plain straight-forward statement of what has happened and what we propose to do.

Oliver: Yes, of course you can't just write to the *Times* and say: "Dear Sir, Blayds' poetry was written by Jenkins, yours faithfully" . . . When will it be, do you think?

Royce: We ought to have it ready by tomorrow.

Oliver: H'm . . . Then I had better start looking for a job at once.

Royce: Nonsense!

Oliver: It isn't nonsense. What do you think my chief will want me for, if I'm not Blayds the poet's grandson?

Royce: Your intrinsic qualities.

Oliver: I'm afraid they are not intrinsic enough in the present state of the market.

Royce: Well, you said you wanted to be a motor engineer—now's your chance.

Oliver: Helpful fellow, Royce. Now, as he says, is my chance. (*There is a pause and then he says suddenly.*) I say, what do *you* think about it all?

Royce: What do you mean, think about it all? What is there to think? One tries not to think. It's —shattering.

Oliver: No, I don't mean that. I mean—do you really think he did it?

Royce: Did what?

Oliver: Did *it.* Did Jenkins.

Royce: I don't understand, is there any doubt about it?

Oliver: Well, that's just it . . . The fact is, I had a brain wave at Bradford.

Royce: Oh?

Oliver: Yes. I said, "By Jove! Of course! That's it!"

Royce: What's what?

Oliver: He never did it! He just imagined it! It was all—what was the word I used?

Royce: Hallucination?

Oliver: Hallucination. (*He nods.*) That's the word. I wrote to father last night. I said, "Hallucination." You can back it both ways, Royce, and you won't be far out.

Royce: Yes, I can see how attractive the word must have looked—up at Bradford.

Oliver: You don't think it looks so well down here?

Royce: I'm afraid not.

Oliver: Well, why not? Which is more probable, that Oliver Blayds carried out this colossal fraud for more than sixty years, or that when he was an old man of ninety his brain wobbled a bit, and he started imagining things?

Royce: (*Shaking his head regretfully.*) No.

Oliver: It's all very well to say "No." Anybody

can say "No." As the Old Man said yesterday, you refuse to face the facts, Royce. Look at all the Will cases you see in the papers. Whenever an old gentleman over seventy leaves his money to anybody but his loving nephews and nieces, they always bring an action to prove that he can't have been quite right in the head when he died; and nine times out of ten they win. Well, Blayds was ninety.

Royce: Yes, but I thought he left you a thousand pounds.

Oliver: Well, I suppose that was a lucid interval . . . Look here, *you* think it over seriously. I read a book once about a fellow who stole another man's novel. Perhaps Blayds read it too and got it mixed up. Why not at that age? Or perhaps he was thinking of using the idea himself. And turning it over and over in his mind, living with it, so to speak, day and night, he might very easily begin to think that it was something that had happened to himself. At his age. And then on his death-bed, feeling that he must confess something—thoroughly muddled, poor old fellow—well, you see how easily it might happen. Hallucination.

Royce: (*Regarding him admiringly.*) You know, Oliver, I think you underrate your intrinsic qualities as a politician. You mustn't waste yourself on engineering.

Oliver: Thanks very much. I suppose Father hasn't mentioned the word "hallucination" to you yet?

Royce: No, not yet.

Oliver: Perhaps he hadn't got my letter this morning. But it's worth thinking about, it is really.

Royce: (*Hard at it again.*) Yes, I am sure it is.

Oliver: You know——

Royce: You know, Oliver, I'm really very busy.

Oliver: (*Getting up.*) Oh, all right. And I want a wash anyway. Is Father in his study?

Royce: Yes. Also very busy. If you really are going, I wish you'd see if Miss Blayds could spare me a moment.

Oliver: Right. (*Turning to the door and seeing Isobel come in.*) She can. Hallo, Aunt Isobel!

Isobel: I thought I heard your voice. Did you have an interesting time?

Oliver: Rather! I was telling Royce. (*He takes her hand and pats it kindly.*) And I say, it's all right. Quite all right. (*He kisses her hand.*) Believe me, it's going to be absolutely all right. You see. (*He pats her hand soothingly and goes out.*)

Isobel: (*Rather touched.*) Dear boy!

Royce: Yes, Oliver has a great future in politics.

Isobel: (*Going to the sofa.*) I'm tired.

Royce: You've been doing too much. Sit down and rest a little.

Isobel: (*Sitting.*) No, go on. I shan't disturb you?

Royce: Talk to me. I've worked quite enough too.

Isobel: Shall we be ready by tomorrow?

Royce: I think so.

Isobel: I want to be rid of it—to get it out of my head where it just goes round and round. It will be a relief when the whole world knows. (*With a little smile.*) What a sensation for them!

Royce: Yes. (*Also smiling.*) Isn't it funny how that comes in?

Isobel: What?

Royce: The excitement at the back of one's mind when anything unusual happens, however disastrous.

Isobel: (*Smiling.*) Did I sound very excited?

Royce: You sounded alive for the first time.

Isobel: These last two days have helped me. It has been a great comfort to have you here. It was good of you to come.

Royce: But of course I came.

Isobel: I was looking up *Who's Who* for an address, and I went on to your name—you know how one does. I hadn't realised you were so famous or so busy. It was good of you to come . . . Your wife died?

Royce: (*Surprised.*) Yes.

Isobel: I didn't know.

Royce: Ten years ago. Surely——

Isobel: Is there a special manner of a man whose wife died ten years ago which I ought to have recognised?

Royce: (*Laughing.*) Well, no. But one always feels that a fact with which one has lived for years must have impressed itself somehow on others.

Isobel: I didn't know . . . .

Royce: (*Suddenly.*) I wish I could persuade you that you were quite wrong not to take any of this money.

Isobel: Am I "quite wrong?"

Royce: (*Shaking his head.*) No. That's why it's so hopeless my trying to persuade you . . . What are you going to do?

Isobel: (*Rather sadly.*) Aren't I a "born nurse?"

Royce: You tied my hand up once.

Isobel: (*Smiling.*) Well, there you are . . . Oh, I daresay it's just pride, but somehow I can't take the money. The others can; you were right about that—

I was wrong; but they have not been so near to him as I have . . . I thought the whole world was at an end at first. But now——

Royce: But now you don't.

Isobel: No. I don't know why. How hopeful we are. How—unbreakable. If I were God, I should be very proud of Man.

Royce: Let Him go on being proud of you.

Isobel: Oh, I'm tough. You can't be a nurse without being tough. I shan't break.

Royce: And just a smile occasionally?

Isobel: (*Smiling adorably.*) And even perhaps just a smile occasionally?

Royce: Thank you.

(*William comes in fussily. But there is a suppressed air of excitement about him. He has Oliver's letter in his hand.*)

William: Isobel, there are two pass-books missing—two of the early ones. I thought you had found them all. You haven't seen them, Mr. Royce?

Royce: No, I've had nothing to do with them.

William: You found most of the early ones in the bottom drawer of his desk, you told me.

Isobel: (*Getting up.*) I may have overlooked one; I'll go and see. There was a great deal of rubbish there.

Royce: Can't I?

Isobel: Would you? You know where. Thank you so much.

Royce: (*Going.*) Right.

William: Thank you very much, Mr. Royce, I'm sorry to trouble you.

(*There is a little silence after Royce is gone.*

Isobel is thinking her own thoughts, not quite such unhappy ones now; William is nervous and excited. After much polishing of his glasses he begins.)

William: Isobel, I have been thinking very deeply of late about this terrible business.

Isobel: Yes?

William: (*Going to the desk.*) Is this the statement?

Isobel: Is it?

William: (*Glancing over it.*) Yes . . . yes. I've been wondering if we've been going too far.

Isobel: About the money?

William: No, no. No, no, I wasn't thinking about the money.

Isobel: What then?

William: Well . . . Well . . . I'm wondering . . . Can we feel quite certain that if we make this announcement—can we feel quite certain that we are not—well—going too far?

Isobel: You mean about the money?

William: No, no, no, no.

Isobel: Then what else? I don't understand.

William: Suppose—I only say suppose—it were not true. I mean, can we be so certain that it *is* true? You see, once we make this announcement it is then too late. We cannot contradict it afterwards and say that we have made a mistake. It is irrevocable.

Isobel: (*Hardly able to believe it.*) Are you suggesting that we should—hush it up?

William: Now you are putting words into my mouth that I have not yet used. I say that it has occurred to me, thinking things over very earnestly, that

possibly we are in too much of a hurry to believe this story of—er—this Jenkins story.

Isobel: You mean that I have invented it, dreamed it, imagined it——?

William: No, no, no, no, please. It would never occur to me to suggest any such thing. What I do suggest as a possibility worth considering is that Oliver Blayds—er—imagined it.

Isobel: You mean he thought it was the other man's poetry when it was really his own?

William: You must remember that he was a very old man. I was saying to Marion in this very room, talking over what I understood then to be his last wish for a simple funeral, that the dying words of an old man were not to be taken too seriously. Indeed, I used on that occasion this actual phrase, "An old man, his faculties rapidly going." I repeat the phrase. I say again that an old man, his faculties rapidly going, may have imagined this story. In short, it has occurred to me that the whole thing may very well be—hallucination.

Isobel: (*Looking at him fixedly.*) Or self-deception.

William: (*Misunderstanding her.*) Exactly. Well, in short, I suggest there never was anybody called Jenkins.

Isobel: (*Brightly—after a pause.*) Wouldn't it be nice?

William. One can understand how upon his deathbed a man feels the need of confession, of forgiveness and absolution. It may well be that Oliver Blayds, instinctively feeling this need, bared his soul to you, not of some real misdeed of his own, but of some im-

aginary misdeed with which, by who knows what association of ideas, his mind had become occupied.

Isobel: You mean he meant to confess to a murder or something, and got muddled.

William: Heaven forbid that I should attribute any misdeed to so noble, so knightly a man as Oliver Blayds.

Isobel: Knightly?

William: I am of course assuming that this man Jenkins never existed.

Isobel: Oh, you *are* assuming that?

William: The more I think of it, the more plain it becomes to me that we *must* assume it.

Isobel: Yes, I quite see that the more one thinks of it, the more—(*She indicates the rest of the sentence with her fingers.*)

William: Well, what do you think of the suggestion?

Isobel: It's so obvious that I'm wondering why it didn't occur to you before.

William: The truth is I was stunned.

Isobel: Oh, yes.

William: And then, I confess, the fact of the 1863 volume seemed for the moment conclusive.

Isobel: But now it doesn't?

William: I explain it now, as one always explained it when he was alive. Every great poet has these lapses.

Isobel: Oh! (*She is silent, looking at William wonderingly, almost admiringly.*)

William: (*After waiting for her comment.*) Well?

Isobel: What can I say, William, except again how nice it will be? No scandal, no poverty, no fuss, and

his life in two volumes just as before. We are a little too late for the Abbey, but, apart from that, everything is as nice as it can be.

William: (*Solemnly.*) You have not mentioned the best thing of all, Isobel.

Isobel: What?

William: That our faith in him has not been misplaced.

(*She looks at him, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry.*)

Isobel: Oh . . . oh . . . (*But there are no words available.*)

(*Marion comes in.*)

Marion: (*Excitedly.*) Isobel dear, have you heard? Have you heard the wonderful news?

Isobel: (*Turning to her blankly.*) News?

Marion: About the hallucination. I always felt that there must have been some mistake. And now our faith has been justified—as faith always is. It's such a comfort to know. Really to know at last. Poor dear Grandfather! He was so very old. I think sometimes we forget how very old he was. And the excitement of that last day—his birthday—and perhaps the glass of port. No wonder.

William: (*Shaking his head wisely.*) Very strange, very strange, but as you say not unexpected. One might almost have predicated some such end.

Marion: I shall never forgive myself for having doubted. (*To Isobel.*) I think Grandfather will forgive us, dear. I can't help feeling that wherever he is, he will forgive us.

William: (*Nodding.*) Yes, yes . . . I shall say nothing about it in the book, of course—this curious lapse in his faculties at the last.

Marion: Of course not, dear.

Isobel: Then you won't want that pass-book now?

Marion: Pass-book?

Isobel: Yes. You were going into the accounts, weren't you, to see how much——

William: (*To Marion.*) Oh—ah—yes, the Jenkins Fund.

Marion: But of course there is no Jenkins now! So there can't be a Jenkins Fund. Such a comfort from every point of view.

Isobel: (*To William.*) You're quite happy about the money, then?

William: (*Who obviously isn't.*) Er—yes—I . . . That is to say, that, while absolutely satisfied that this man Jenkins never existed, I—at the same time—I—well, perhaps to be on the safe side—there are certain charities . . . As I say, there *are* certain charities for distressed writers and so on, and perhaps one would feel—you see what I mean. (*He goes to the desk.*)

Isobel: Yes. It's what they call conscience-money, isn't it?

William: (*Not hearing.*) But of course all that can be settled later. (*He picks up Royce's statement.*) The main point is that this will not now be wanted. (*He prepares to tear it in two.*)

Isobel: (*Fiercely.*) No! Put that down!

(*Startled he puts it down, and she snatches it up and holds it close to her heart.*)

Marion: Isobel, dear!

Isobel: It's his, and you're not to touch it! He has given his time to it, and you're not going to throw it away as if it were nothing. It's for *him* to say.

William: (*Upset.*) Really! I was only just——

(*Royce comes in.*)

Royce: (*Excitedly.*) I say!

Isobel: Mr. Royce, we have some news for you. We have decided that the man Jenkins never existed. Isn't it nice?

Royce: Never existed?

Isobel: He was just an hallucination. (*To William.*) Wasn't that the word?

Royce: (*Laughing.*) Oh, I see. That's rather funny. For what do you think I've got here! (*He holds up a faded piece of paper.*) Stuck in this old pass-book. Jenkins' will.

William: (*Staggered.*) O-o-o-o-oh!

Marion: (*Bewildered.*) It must be another Jenkins. Because we've just decided that our one never lived.

Isobel: What is it? What does it say?

Royce: (*Reading.*) "To Oliver Blayds who has given me everything I leave everything." And then underneath, "God bless you, dear Oliver."

Isobel: (*Moved.*) Oh!

William: Let me look. (*He takes it.*)

Isobel: (*To herself.*) All those years ago!

William: Yes, there's no doubt of it. (*He gives the paper back to Royce.*) Wait! Let me think. (*He sits down, head in hands.*)

Royce: (*To Marion.*) Well, that settles the money side of it, anyway. Whatever should have been the other man's came rightfully to Oliver Blayds.

Isobel: Except the immortality.

Royce: Ah, yes. I say nothing of that. (*Going to the desk and picking up his statement.*) I shall have

to re-write this . . . Well, the first part can stand . . . I'm glad we aren't going to be bothered about money. It would have been an impossible business to settle.

William: (*Triumphantly.*) I've got it!

Marion: What, dear?

William: Now I understand everything.

Royce: What?

William: The 1863 volume. That always puzzled me. Now at last, we have the true explanation. (*Dramatically.*) The 1863 volume was written by Jenkins!

(*Isobel and Royce look at him in amazement; Marion in admiration.*)

Royce: (*To himself.*) Poor old Jenkins.

Marion: Of course I liked all grandfather's poetry. There was some of it I didn't understand, but I felt that *he* knew——

William: No, we can be frank now. The 1863 volume was bad. And now we see why. He wished to give this dear dead friend of his a chance. I can see these two friends—Oliver—and—er—(*Going to Royce*) What was Mr—er—Jenkins' other name? (*He reads it over Royce's shoulder.*) Ah, yes, Willoughby—I can see that last scene when Willoughby lay dying, and his friend Oliver stood by his side. I can hear Willoughby lamenting that none of his poetry will ever be heard now in the mouths of others—and Oliver's silent resolve that in some way, at some time, Willoughby's work shall be given to the world. And so in 1863, when his own position was firmly established, he issues this little collection of his dead friend's poetry, these few choicest sheaves from poor Willoughby's indiscriminate harvest, sheltering them, as

he hoped, from the storm of criticism with the mantle of his own great name. A noble resolve, a chivalrous undertaking, but alas! of no avail.

Royce: You will say this in your life of Oliver Blayds?

William: I shall—er—hint at the doubtful authorship of the 1863 volume; perhaps it would be better not to go into the matter too fully.

Marion: (*To Isobel.*) It would be much nicer, dear, if we didn't refer to any of the unhappy thoughts which we have all had about Grandfather in the last few days. We know now that we never ought to have doubted. He was—Grandfather.

Isobel: (*After a pause, to Royce.*) Well?

(*He shrugs his shoulders.*)

Will you find the children? I think they ought to know this.

Royce: Right. Do you want me to come back?

Isobel: Please.

(*He goes out. When he has gone, she turns to William.*)

I am going to publish the truth about Oliver Blayds.

Marion: But that's what we all want to do, dear.

William: What do you mean by the truth?

Isobel: What we all know to be the truth in our hearts.

William: I deny it. I deny it utterly. I am convinced that the explanation which I have given is the true one.

Isobel: Then I shall publish the explanation which he gave *me.*

William: Isobel, I should have thought that you,

of all people, would have wanted to believe in Oliver Blayds.

Isobel: Wanted to! If only "wanting to" were the same as believing, how easy life would be!

Marion: It *is* very nearly the same, dear. If you try very hard. I have found it a great comfort.

William: I must beg you to reconsider your decision. I had the honour of the friendship of Oliver Blayds for many years, and I tell you frankly that I will not allow this slander of a dead man to pass unchallenged.

Isobel: Which dead man?

William: (*A little upset.*) This slander on Oliver Blayds.

Isobel: It is not slander. I shall tell the truth about him.

William: Then I shall tell the truth about him too.

(*Isobel turns away with a shrug, and sees Septima, Royce and Oliver coming in.*)

Isobel: Thank you, Mr. Royce. Septima, Oliver—

(*She gives them the will to read.*)

Oliver: (*After reading.*) By Jove! Sportsman! I always said—(*Frankly.*) No, I didn't.

Septima: (*After reading.*) Good. Well, that's all right then.

Isobel: We have been talking over what I told you the other day, and your Father now has a theory, that it was the 1863 volume which was written by this man, and that your Grandfather in telling me the story had got it into his head somehow——

William: A very old man, his faculties rapidly going——

Isobel: Had muddled the story up.

Oliver: (*Brightening up.*) Good for you, Father! I see! Of course! Then it was hallucination after all?

Isobel: You had discussed it before?

Oliver: Oh, rather!

Isobel: (*To Septima.*) And you?

Oliver: I told Septima the idea.

Isobel: And what does Septima say?

They All turn to her.

Septima: (*Emphatically.*) Rot!

Marion: (*Shocked.*) Septima! Your father!

Septima: Well, you asked me what I said, and I'm telling you. Rot. R-O-T.

William: (*Coldly.*) Kindly explain yourself a little more lucidly.

Oliver: It's all rot saying "rot"——

William: One at a time, please. Septima?

Septima: I think it's rot, trying to deceive ourselves by making up a story about Grandfather, just because we don't like the one which he told Aunt Isobel. What does it all matter anyhow? There's the poetry, and jolly good too, most of it. What does it matter when you've quoted it, whether you add, "As Blayds nobly said" or "As Jenkins nobly said"? It's the same poetry. There was Grandfather. We all knew him well, and we all had plenty of chances of making up our minds about him. How can what he did seventy years ago, when he was another person altogether, make any difference to our opinion of him? And then there's the money. I said that it ought to be ours, and it is ours. Well, there we are.

William: You are quite content that your Aunt should publish, as she proposes to, this story of—er—

Willoughby Jenkins, which I am convinced is a base libel on the reputation of Oliver Blayds?

Oliver: I say, Aunt Isobel, are you really going to? I mean do you *still* believe——

Isobel: I am afraid I do, Oliver.

Oliver: Good Lord!

William: Well—Septima?

Septima: I am quite content with the truth. And if you want the truth about Septima Blayds-Conway, it is that the truth about Blayds is not really any great concern of hers.

Oliver: Well, that's a pretty selfish way of looking at it.

Marion: I don't know what Grandfather would say if he could hear you.

Isobel: Thank you, Septima. You're honest anyhow.

Septima: Well, of course.

Oliver: It's all very well for *her* to talk like that, but it's a jolly big concern of mine. If it comes out, I'm done. As a politician anyway.

Royce: What do *you* believe, Oliver?

Oliver: I told you. Hallucination. At least it seems just as likely as the other. And that being so, I think we ought to give it the benefit of the doubt. What *is* the truth about Blayds—I don't know——

Isobel: (*Calmly.*) I do, Oliver.

William: (*Sharply.*) So do I.

Oliver: Well, I mean, there you are. Probably the truth lies somewhere in between——

Royce: (*With a smile, speaking almost unconsciously.*) No, no, you mustn't waste yourself on en-

gineering. (*Recovering himself with a start.*) I beg your pardon.

Oliver: Anyway, I'm with Father. I don't think we ought to take the risk of doing Oliver Blayds an injustice by saying anything about this—this hallucination.

William: There is no question of risk. It's a certainty. Come, Marion. (*He leads the way to the door.*) We have much to do. (*Challengingly.*) We have much work yet to do upon the life of this great poet, this great and chivalrous gentleman, Oliver Blayds!

Marion: (*Meekly.*) Yes, dear.

(*They go out.*)

Oliver: Oh, Lord, a family row! I'm not sure that that isn't worse . . . "Interviewed by our representative, Mr. Oliver Blayds-Conway said that he preferred not to express an opinion." I think that's my line.

Septima: Yes, it would be.

Oliver: Well, I must go. (*Grandly.*) We have much work yet to do . . . Coming, Tim?

Septima: (*Getting up.*) Yes. (*She goes slowly after him, hesitates, and then comes back to Isobel. Awkwardly she touches her shoulders and says.*) Good luck!

(*Then she goes out.*

Royce, and Isobel stand looking at each other. First he begins to smile; then she. Suddenly they are both laughing.)

Isobel: How absurd!

Royce: I was afraid you wouldn't appreciate it. Well, what are you going to do?

Isobel: What can I do but tell the world the truth?

Royce: H'm! I wonder if the world will be grateful.

Isobel: Does that matter?

Royce: Yes, I think it does. I think you ought to feel that you are benefiting somebody—other than yourself.

Isobel: (*With a smile.*) I am hardly benefiting myself.

Royce: Not materially, of course—but spiritually? Aren't you just easing your conscience?

Isobel: I don't see why the poor thing shouldn't be eased.

Royce: At the other people's expense?

Isobel: Oh, but no, Austin, no. I'm sure that's wrong. Surely the truth means more than that. Surely it's an end in itself. The only end. Call it Truth or call it Beauty, it's all we're here for.

Royce: You know, the trouble is that the Truth about Blayds won't seem very beautiful. There's your truth, and then there's William's truth, too. To the public it will seem not so much like Beauty as like an undignified family squabble. No, it's no good. You can't start another miserable Shakespeare-Bacon controversy. Because that is what it would be in a few years. There would be no established truth, but just a Jenkins' theory. All that the man in the street would gather of it would be that years ago a thief called Jenkins had tried to steal Blayds' poetry. Hadn't we better just leave him with the poetry?

Isobel: It seems so unfair that this poor dead boy should be robbed of the immortality which he wanted.

Royce: Hasn't he got it? There are his works. Didn't he have the wonderful happiness and pain of

writing them? How can you do anything for him now? It's just pure sentiment, isn't it?

Isobel: (*Meekly.*) If you say so, sir.

Royce: (*Laughing.*) Am I lecturing? I'm sorry.

Isobel: No, I don't mind. And I expect you're right. I can't do anything. (*After a pause.*) Are one's motives ever pure?

Royce: One hopes so. One never knows.

Isobel: I keep telling myself that I want the truth to prevail—but is it only that? Or is it that I wanted to punish him? . . . He hurt me so. All those years he was pretending that I helped him. Think of it. *My* advice, *my* criticism, *my* help—and there, all the time, was the masterpiece, written sixty years ago by another, and I thought that *we* were writing it together then! It was all just a game to him. A game —and he was laughing. Do you wonder that I was bitter? It was just a game to him.

Royce: As he said, he carried it off.

Isobel: Yes, he carried it off . . . Even in those last moments he was carrying it off. Just that. He was frightened at first—he was dying; it was so lonely in the grave; there was no audience there; no one to listen, to admire. Only God. Ah, but when he had begun his story, how quickly he was the artist again! No fear now, no remorse. Just the artist glorying in his story; putting all he knew into the telling of it, making me see that dead boy whom he had betrayed, so vividly that I could have stretched out my hand to him, and said "Oh, my dear, I'm sorry—I will make it all right for you." Oh, he had his qualities, Oliver Blayds. My father, yes; but somehow he never seemed that. A great man; a little man; but never quite my father.

Royce: A great man, I think.

Isobel: Yes, he was a great man, and he did less hurt to the world than most great men do.

Royce: (*Picking up his statement.*) Then I can tear up this?

Isobel: (*After a little struggle with herself.*) Yes! Let us bury the dead, and forget about them.

(*He tears it up. She gives a sigh of relief.*)

(*With a smile.*) There!

Royce: (*Coming to her.*) Isobel!

Isobel: Ah—but she's dead, too. Let's forget about her.

Royce: She is not dead. I have seen her.

Isobel: When did you see her?

Royce: Today I have seen her. She peeped out for a moment, and was gone.

Isobel: She just peeped out to say good-bye to you.

Royce: (*Shaking his head.*) No. To say "How do you do" to me.

Isobel: My dear, she died eighteen years ago, that child.

Royce: (*Smiling.*) Then introduce me to her mother.

Isobel: (*Gravely, with a smile behind it.*) Mr. Royce, let me introduce you to my mother—thirty-eight, poor dear. (*Bowing.*) How do you do, Mr. Royce? I have heard my daughter speak of you.

Royce: How do you do, Mrs. Bladys? I'm glad to meet you, because I once asked your daughter to marry me.

Isobel: (*Unhappily.*) Ah, don't, don't!

Royce: (*Cheerfully.*) Do you know what she said? She said, like all properly brought up girls, "You must ask my mother." So now I ask her—"Isobel's mother, will *you* marry me?"

Isobel: Oh!

Royce: Isobel was quite right. I was too old for her. Look, I'm grey. And then I've got a bit of rheumatism about me somewhere—I really want a nurse. Isobel said you were a born nurse . . . Isobel's mother, will you marry me?

Isobel: It's only because you are sorry for me—because I'm lonely and poor.

Royce: It's very selfish of you, talking like that.

Isobel: Selfish?

Royce: Harping on your loneliness. What about *my* loneliness?

Isobel: You aren't lonely.

Royce: I shall be if you don't marry me.

Isobel: I'm afraid to. I shall be so jealous.

Royce: Jealous! Of whom?

Isobel: Of that girl we call my daughter. You will always be looking for her. You will think that I shan't see; you will try to hide it from me; but I shall see. Always you will be looking for her—and I shall see.

Royce: I shall find her.

Isobel: No, it's too late now.

Royce: (*Confidently.*) I shall find her. Not yet, perhaps; but some day. Perhaps it will be on a day in April, when the primroses are out between the woodstacks, and there is a chatter of rooks in the tall elms.

Then, a child again, she will laugh for joy of the clean blue morning, and I shall find her. And when I have found her, I shall say——

Isobel: (*Gently.*) Yes?

Royce: I shall say, "Thank God, you are so like your mother—whom I love."

Isobel: No, no, it can't be true.

Royce: It is true. (*Holding out his hands.*) I want you—not her.

Isobel: Oh, my dear!

(*She puts out her hands to his. As he takes them, Marion comes in hurriedly. Their hands drop, and they stand there, looking happily at each other.*)

Marion: Isobel! I had to come and tell you how hurt William is. Dear, don't you think you *could* believe—just for William's sake——

Isobel: (*Gently.*) It's all right, dear. I am not going to say anything.

Marion: (*Eagerly.*) You mean you believe?

William comes in, and she rushes to him.

She believes! She believes!

Isobel and Royce exchange a smile.

William: (*With satisfaction.*) Ah! I am very glad to hear this. As regards the biography. In the circumstances, since we are all agreed as to the facts, I almost think we might record the story of Oliver Blayds' chivalrous attempt to assist his friend, definitely assigning to Willoughby Jenkins the 1863 volume. (*He looks at them for approval.*)

(*Marion nods.*)

Isobel: (*Looking demurely at Royce and then back again.*) Yes, William.

William: I feel strongly, and I am sure you will agree with me, that it is our duty to tell the *whole* truth about that great man. (*Again he looks to Marion for approval. She assents.*)

Isobel: (*Aside to Royce—enjoying it with him.*) Do I still say, "Yes, William"?

(*He smiles and nods.*)

Yes, William.

(*And so that is how the story will be handed down.*)

THE GREAT BROXOPP

Four
Chapters
In
His
Life

A
Comedy

CHARACTERS

BROXOPP
NANCY, *His Wife*
JACK, *His Son*
SIR ROGER TENTERDEN
IRIS TENTERDEN
HONORIA JOHNS
RONALD DERWENT
NORAH FIELD
BENHAM
MARY
ALICE

Scene: The scene is laid in the Broxopp home of the period.

Twenty-four years pass between Act I and Act II, eighteen months between Act II and Act III, and a year between Act III and Act IV.

ACT I

Scene: The Great Broxopp's lodgings in Bloomsbury; a humble room in the year 188—, *for Broxopp has only just begun. He has been married for six months, and we see Nancy (the dear) at work, while her husband is looking for it. He is an advertising agent in the days when advertising agents did not lunch with peers and newspaper proprietors. Probably he would prefer to call himself an "adviser to men of business." As we see from a large advertisement on the wall—drawn and lettered by hand (Nancy's)—he has been hoping to advise Spenlow on the best way to sell his suspenders. Other pieces of advice decorate the walls—some accepted, some even paid for—and Nancy is now making a fair copy of one of them.*

Mary, the Broxopp's servant—Nancy thought they could do without one, but the Great Broxopp knew how she would love being called "Yes, ma'am," and insisted on it—well then, Mary comes in.

Nancy: (*Without looking up.*) Yes, Mary?

Mary: It's about the dinner, ma'am.

Nancy: (*With a sigh.*) Yes, I was afraid it was. It isn't a very nice subject to talk about, is it, Mary?

Mary: Well, ma'am, it has its awkwardness like.

Nancy: (*After a pause, but not very hopefully.*) How is the joint looking?

Mary: Well, it's past looking like anything very much.

Nancy: Well, there's the bone.

Mary: Yes, there's the bone.

Nancy: (*Gaily.*) Well, there we are, Mary. Soup.

Mary: If you remember, ma'am, we had soup yesterday.

Nancy: (*Wistfully.*) Couldn't you—couldn't you squeeze it again, Mary?

Mary: It's past squeezing, ma'am—in this world.

Nancy: I was reading in a book the other day about two people who went out to dinner one night—they always dine late in books, Mary—and ordered a grilled bone. It seemed such a funny thing to have, when they had everything else to choose from. I suppose *our* bone——?

Mary: Grilling wouldn't do it no good, ma'am.

Nancy: (*Trying to be fair.*) Well, I suppose we mustn't blame it. It has been a good joint to *us.*

Mary: A good stayer, as you might say.

Nancy: Yes. Well, I suppose we shall have to get another.

Mary: Yes, ma'am.

Nancy: Would you look in my purse?

(*Mary goes to the desk and opens the purse.*)

How much is there?

Mary: Three coppers and two stamps, ma'am.

Nancy: Oh! (*Determined to be brave.*) Well, that's five pence.

Mary: *They* are halfpenny stamps, ma'am.

Nancy: (*Utterly undone.*) Oh, Mary! What a very unfortunate morning we're having. (*Coaxingly.*) Well, anyhow it's four pence, isn't it?

Mary: Yes, ma'am.

Nancy: Well, now what can we get for fourpence?

Mary: (*Stolidly.*) A turkey.

Nancy: (*Laughing with complete happiness.*) Oh, Mary, don't be so gloomy about it. (*Collapsing into laughter again.*) Let's have two turkeys—two tuppenny ones.

Mary: It's enough to make anyone gloomy to see a nice gentleman like Mr. Broxopp and a nice lady like yourself starving in a garret.

Nancy: I don't know what a garret is, but if this is one, I love garrets. And we're not starving; we've got fourpence. (*Becoming practical again.*) What about a nice chop?

Mary: It isn't much for two of you.

Nancy: Three of us, Mary.

Mary: Oh, I can do all right on bread and cheese, ma'am.

Nancy: Well then, so can I. And Jim can have the chop. There! Now let me get on with my work. (*Contemptuously to herself as she goes on with her writing.*) Starving! And in a house *full* of bread and cheese!

Mary: Mr. Broxopp is not the sort of gentleman to eat a chop while his wife is only eating a bit of cheese.

Nancy: (*With love in her voice and eyes.*) No, he isn't! (*Proudly.*) Isn't he a *fine* man, Mary?

Mary: Yes, he's a real gentleman is Mr. Broxopp. It's queer he doesn't make more money.

Nancy: Well, you see, he's an artist.

Mary: (*Surprised.*) An artist? Now that's funny, I've never seen him painting any of his pictures.

Nancy: I don't mean that sort of an artist. I mean

he's—(*Wrinkling her forehead.*) Now, how did he put it yesterday? He likes ideas for their own sake. He wants to educate the public up to them. He doesn't believe in pandering to the public for money. He's in advance of his generation—like all great artists.

Mary: (*Hopefully.*) Yes, ma'am.

Nancy: (*Pointing to the advertisement of Spenlow's suspenders.*) Now, there you see what I mean. Now that's what the artist in Mr. Broxopp feels that a suspender-advertisement *ought* to be like. But Mr. Spenlow doesn't agree with him. Mr. Spenlow says it's above the public's head. And so he's rejected Jim's work. That's the worst of trying to work for a man like Mr. Spenlow. He doesn't understand artists. Jim says that if *he* saw an advertisement like that, he'd buy ten pairs at once, even if he never wore anything but kilts. And Jim says you can't work for men like that, and one day he'll write advertisements for something of his own.

Mary: Lor, ma'am! Well, I've often wondered myself if it was quite decent for a gentleman like Mr. Broxopp to write about things that aren't generally spoken of in ordinary give and take conversation. But then——

Nancy: (*With pretty dignity.*) That is not the point, Mary. An artist has no limitations of that sort. And—and you're interrupting me at my work.

Mary: (*Going over to her and just touching her lightly on the shoulder.*) Bless you, dearie, you *are* fond of him, aren't you?

Nancy: Oh, I just love him. (*Eagerly.*) And he must have that chop to himself, Mary, and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll write him a little note to say I've been invited out to dinner—and who do you think is going to invite me? Why, you! And we'll have our bread

and cheese together in the kitchen. Won't that be fun? (*Suddenly looking tragic.*) Oh!

Mary: What's the matter, ma'am?

Nancy: Why, perhaps he'll go out again directly after dinner and then I shan't have seen him all day! (*After thinking it over.*) No, Mary, I shall have dinner with him. (*Firmly.*) But I shall say I'm *not* hungry.

(*There is a sound of whistling on the stairs.*) Listen, there's Jim! Oh, Mary, go quickly! He hasn't seen me for such a long time and he'll like to find me alone.

Mary: (*Sympathetically.*) I know, ma'am. (*She goes out.*)

(*The Great Broxopp comes in. He wears a tail coat of the period, a wide-awake hat and a spreading blue tie—"The Broxopp tie" as it is called in later years. He is twenty-five at this time, but might be any age, an impetuous, enthusiastic, flamboyant, simple creature; candid, generous; a gentleman, yet with no manners; an artist, yet not without vulgarity. His beliefs are simple. He believes in himself and Nancy; but mostly in himself.*)

Broxopp: (*Holding out his arms.*) Nancy!

Nancy: Jim! (*She flies into his arms.*)

Broxopp: (*Releasing himself and looking at his watch.*) Two hours and twenty minutes since I kissed you, Nancy.

Nancy: Is that all? It seems so much longer.

Broxopp: (*Comparing his watch with the clock.*) You're right; I'm a little slow. It's two hours and twenty-three minutes. I must have another one. (*Has one.*)

Nancy: Oh, Jim, darling, it's lovely having you back. But you're early, aren't you? Tell me what's been happening.

Broxopp: (*Trying to speak indifferently.*) How do you know anything has been happening?

Nancy: (*Excitedly.*) Then it *has!* I knew it had! I felt it. Tell me quickly! (*With a sudden change.*) No, don't tell me quickly, tell me very, very slowly. Begin from the very beginning when you left here after breakfast. (*Pleadingly.*) Only just tell me first that it *is* good news.

Broxopp: (*With an air.*) Madam, you see in front of you the Great Broxopp.

Nancy. Yes, but you've told me that every day since we've been married.

Broxopp: (*Momentarily shaken, but quickly recovering.*) But you believed it! Say you believed it!

Nancy: Of course I did.

Broxopp: (*Strutting about the room.*) Aha, *she* knew! She recognised the Great Broxopp. (*Striking an attitude.*) And now the whole world will know.

Nancy: Is it as wonderful as that?

Broxopp: (*Taking her hands.*) It is, Nancy, it is! I have been singing all the way home. (*Seriously.*) Nancy, when we have lots of money I think I shall learn to sing. An artist like myself requires to give expression to his feelings in his great moments. Several people on the bus objected to my singing. I'm afraid they were right.

Nancy: (*Awed.*) Are we going to have lots of money one day? Oh, quick, tell me—but slowly right from the beginning. (*She arranges his chair for him.*) Or would you rather walk about, dear?

Broxopp: (*Sitting down.*) Well, I shall probably have to walk about directly, but—Where are *you* going to sit?

Nancy: (*On the floor at his knees.*) Here.

Broxopp: (*Earnestly.*) Nancy, you must get me out of my habit of sitting down before you are seated. It isn't what a gentleman would do.

Nancy: (*Patting his hand.*) It's what a husband would do. That's what wives are for—to make their husbands comfy.

Broxopp: Well, dear, never hesitate to tell me any little thing you notice about me. I never drop my aitches now, do I?

Nancy: (*Smiling lovingly at him.*) Never, darling.

Broxopp: (*Complacently.*) Very few people could have got out of that in a year. But then (*raising his hand with a gesture of pride.*) Broxopp is not like—dear me, have I been wearing my hat all the time?

Nancy: Yes, darling, I love you in your hat.

(*A little upset, Broxopp takes it off and throws it on the floor.*)

Broxopp: (*Pained.*) Darling, you should have told me.

Nancy: I love you so—just as you are. The Great Broxopp. Now then, begin from the beginning.

Broxopp: (*His happiness recovered.*) Well, after breakfast—a breakfast so enormous that, as I said to you at the time, I probably shouldn't require any dinner after it——

Nancy: (*Hastily.*) Yes, darling, but I said it first, and I really meant it. (*Carelessly.*) I don't know how it is, but somehow I feel I shan't be at all hungry for dinner today.

Broxopp: (*Looking down lovingly at her.*) Nancy, what *is* for dinner today?

Nancy: (*As though dinner were a small matter in that house.*) Oh, chops, bread and cheese and all that sort of thing. (*Eagerly.*) But never mind dinner now —go on telling me.

Broxopp: Nancy, look at me and tell me how many chops you have ordered?

Nancy: (*Bravely.*) I thought perhaps one would be enough for you, dear, as you weren't very hungry, and not being hungry myself——

Broxopp: (*Jumping up excitedly.*) I thought so! The Great Broxopp to dine off one chop! The Great Broxopp's wife to dine off no chops! (*He leans against the wall in a magnificent manner and with a tremendous flourish produces a five pound note.*) Woman, buy five hundred chops! (*Producing another five pound note with an even greater air.*) Five hundred tons of fried potatoes! (*Flourishing a third note.*) Five million bottles of tomato sauce! (*Thumping his heart.*) That's the sort of man I am.

Nancy: (*Excitedly.*) Jim! Have you earned all this?

Broxopp: (*Disparagingly.*) Tut! That's nothing to what is coming.

Nancy: Fifteen pounds! (*Suddenly remembering.*) Now what would you *really* like for dinner?

Broxopp: (*Going over to her and taking her hands.*) Nancy, *you* believed in me all the time. It has been weary waiting for you, but now—(*Answering her question.*) I think I should like a kiss.

Nancy: (*Kissing him and staying very close.*) Of course I believed in you, my wonderful man. And now

they'll all believe in you. (*After a pause.*) Who believed the fifteen pounds? Was it Mr. Spenlow?

Broxopp: Spenlow? Bah! (*He strides across the room and tears down the Spenlow advertisements.*) Spenlow comes down—like his suspenders. *Facilis descensus Spenlovi.* (*Dramatically.*) I see the man Spenlow begging his bread from door to door. I see his wife's stockings falling in swathes about her ankles. I see——

Nancy: Darling!

Broxopp: You're quite right, dear. I'm being vulgar again. And worse than that—uncharitable. When we are rich, we will ask the Spenlows to stay with us. We will be kind to them; we will provide them with suspenders.

Nancy: (*Bringing him back to the point.*) Jim! (*She holds up the money.*) You haven't told me yet.

Broxopp: (*Carelessly.*) Oh, that? That was from Fordyce.

Nancy: The Fordyce cheap Restaurants?

Broxopp: The same. I had an inspiration this morning. I forced my way into the office of the man Fordyce and I took him on one side and whispered winged words into his ear. I said (*Dramatically.*) "Fordyce fills you for fivepence." It will be all over London tomorrow. "Fordyce fills you for five pence." What an arresting thought to a hungry man!

Nancy: Shall we have dinner there today, dear?

Broxopp: Good Heavens, no! It is sufficient that I drag others into his beastly eating-house. *We* will dine on champagne, regally.

Nancy: Darling, I know you are an artist and musn't be thwarted but—there's the rent—and—and other days coming—and——

Broxopp: (*Dropping into his chair again.*) Nancy, come and sit on my knee. (*With suppressed excitement.*) Quick, while I'm sitting down. I shall be wanting to walk about directly. This room is too small for me.

(*She comes to him.*)

Nancy, it has been a hard struggle for you, I'm afraid.

Nancy: I've loved it, Jim.

Broxopp: Well, that's over now. Now the real fun is beginning. (*Triumphantly.*) Nancy, I'm on my own at last. Broxopp is on his own! (*He puts her down impetuously and jumps up.*) I look into the future and what do I see? I see on every hoarding, I see on the side of every omnibus, I see dotted among the fields along the great railway routes these magic words: "BROXOPP'S BEANS FOR BABIES."

Nancy: (*Carried away.*) Darling!

Broxopp: Yes! I have begun. And now the world will see what advertisement can do in the hands of an artist. Broxopp's Beans for Babies.

Nancy: But—(*Timidly*) do babies like beans?

Broxopp: (*Confidently.*) They will. I can make them like anything. I can make them *cry* for beans. They will lean out of their little cradles and hold out their little hands and say: "Broxopp. I want Broxopp. Give me my beans."

Nancy: (*Seeing them.*) The darlings. (*Business-like.*) Now tell me all about it.

Broxopp: (*Really meaning to this time.*) It began with—(*Tenderly.*) Ah, Nancy, it began with *you.* I might have known it would. I owe it, like everything else, to you.

Nancy: (*Awed.*) To me?

Broxopp: To you. It was the nail-brush.

Nancy: The nail-brush?

Broxopp: Yes, you told me the other day to buy a nail-brush. (*Looking at his fingers.*) You were quite right. As you said, a gentleman is known by his hands. I hadn't thought of it before. Always tell me, darling. Well, I went into a chemist's. Fordyce had given me fifteen guineas. I had the odd shillings in my pocket and I suddenly remembered. There was a very nice gentlemanly young fellow behind the counter, and as sometimes happens on these occasions, I got into conversation with him.

Nancy: (*Smiling to herself.*) Yes, darling.

Broxopp: I told him something of my outlook on life. I spoke of the lack of imagination which is the curse of this country, instancing the man Spenlow as an example of the type with whom we artists had to deal. He interrupted me to say that he had found it so, too. A patent food which he had composed in his leisure moments—I broke in hastily. "Tell me of your food," I said. "Perhaps," and I smote my breast, "perhaps *I* am the capitalist for whom you look."

Nancy: The five hundred pounds!

Broxopp: The five hundred pounds. The nest egg which I had been keeping for just such a moment. In a flash I saw that the moment had come.

Nancy: (*A little frightened.*) Then we shall never have that five hundred pounds behind us again.

Broxopp: But think of the thousands we shall have in front of us! Millions!

Nancy: We seemed so safe with that in the bank.

Your little inheritance. No, darling, I'm not disagreeing. I know you're quite right. But I'm just a little frightened. You see, I'm not so brave as you.

Broxopp: But you will be brave *with* me? You believe in me?

Nancy: Oh, yes, yes. (*Bravely.*) Go on.

Broxopp: (*Going on.*) He told me about his discovery. A food for babies. Thomson's Food for Babies, he called it. (*Scornfully.*) No wonder nobody would look at it. "The name you want on that food," I said, "is Broxopp." Who is Thomson? Anybody. The next man you meet may be Thomson. But there is only one Broxopp—the Great Broxopp. (*With an inspired air.*) Broxopp's Beans for Babies.

Nancy: (*Timidly.*) I still don't quite see why beans.

Broxopp: Nor did he, Nancy. "Mr. Thomson," I said, "this is *my* business. *You* go about inventing foods. Do I interfere with you? No. I don't say that we must have this that and the other in it. All I do is to put it on the market and advertise it. And when I'm doing that, don't you interfere with *me*. Why beans? you say. Exactly! I want the whole of England to ask that question. Beans for Babies—what an absurd idea! Who *is* this Broxopp? Once they begin talking like that, I've got them. As for the food—make it up into bean shape and let them dissolve it. Or no. Leave it as it is. They'll talk about it more that way. *Lucus a non lucendo.*

Nancy: What does *that* mean?

Broxopp: (*Off-handedly.*) It's Latin, dear, for calling a thing black because it's white. Thomson understood; he's an educated man, he's not like Spenlow.

Nancy: And do we share the profits with Mr. Thomson?

Broxopp: He'll have to take some, of course, because it's his food. I shall be generous to him, Nancy; don't you be afraid of that.

Nancy: I know you will, darling; that's what I'm afraid of.

Broxopp: (*Carelessly.*) We shall have an agreement drawn up. (*On fire to begin.*) It will be hard work for the first year. Every penny we make will have to be used again to advertise it. (*Thumping the table.*) But I can do it! With you helping me, Nancy, I can do it.

Nancy: (*Adoringly.*) You can do it, my man. And oh! how proud I shall be of helping you.

Broxopp: (*Dreaming.*) And the time will come when the world will be full of Broxopp Babies. I look into the future and I see—millions of them.

Nancy: (*Coming very close.*) Jim, when I am all alone, then sometimes I look into the future, too.

Broxopp: (*Indulgently.*) And what do you see, Nancy?

Nancy: (*Over-awed by what she sees.*) Sometimes I seem to see *one* little Broxopp baby.

Broxopp: (*With a shout.*) Nancy! You mean——

Nancy: (*Softly.*) Would you like to have a little one of your very own, Jim?

Broxopp: My darling! (*He takes her in his arms.*)

Nancy: My husband!

Broxopp: (*Releasing her.*) A Broxopp—to carry on the name. A little Broxopp! (*The idea suddenly comes to him.*) Nancy, he shall be the first, the pioneer of all the Broxopp Babies. (*Carried away.*) I see him—everywhere—sitting in his little vest——

Nancy: (*Seeing him too.*) His little vest!

Broxopp: Holding out his little pudgy hand——

Nancy: His little pudgy hand!

Broxopp: And saying to all the world—(*He hesitates, and a sudden triumphant inspiration gives him the words.*) "I am a Broxopp Baby—are you?"

(*They gaze into the future, Broxopp seeing his million babies, Nancy seeing her one.*)

ACT II

Scene: A sitting-room in the Great Broxopp's house in Queen's Gate. Being the room in which he is generally interviewed, it is rather heavily furnished, as befits a commercial prince. The desk with the telephone on it, the bookcase, the chairs and sofa, the mantelpiece are all solid. But what really attracts your eye is the large picture of the baby, looking at you over the end of his cot, and saying: "I am a Broxopp baby—are you?" At least, he says so on the posters; this is the original, in a suitable gold frame, for which Jack Broxopp sat twenty-three years ago.

(*Benham, the new butler* (*Jack's idea*) *is discovered answering the telephone.*)

Benham: (*At telephone.*) Hello . . . Mr. Broxopp is not here for the moment, sir. Can I take a message . . . To ring Mr. Morris up some time this morning. Yes, sir . . . Thank you, sir. (*He walks back to the door and meets Alice coming in.*)

Alice: Oh, Mr. Benham, I was looking for you. There's a young woman, name of Johns, just come to see the master. Would you wish to show her up yourself, Mr. Benham? You see we're not used to a gentleman with us downstairs. It's all so new to us. When you were with His Grace——

Benham: Who is this young woman?

Alice: (*Giving card.*) She comes from one of the newspapers.

Benham: (*Reading.*) "Miss Honoria Johns, Special Correspondent to the *Daily Gossip*. Contributor to the *Queen* and other leading journals." (*Contemptuously.*) What does she want? An interview?

Alice: She didn't say, Mr. Benham, but I expect that's what she wants.

Benham: I'll send her away. Bless you, I had to send hundreds of them away when I was with His Grace.

Alice: (*Alarmed.*) Oh, but I don't think Mr. Broxopp would like that.

Benham: (*Staggered.*) Do you mean to say that he wants to be interviewed?

Alice: Oh, I'm sure he does. But I suppose he's gone to his office. Oh, no, he hasn't, because there's his hat.

Benham: (*Scandalised.*) His hat? Has he only got one hat?

Alice: Only one that he wears. What the papers call the "Broxopp hat."

Benham: (*To Heaven.*) If anybody had told me a year ago that I should take service in a house where we only wore one hat—but there! "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform."

Alice: Oh, but it isn't as if Mr. Broxopp was just an ordinary gentleman. You mustn't think that, Mr. Benham.

Benham: You all make too much of your Mr. Broxopp, my girl. After all, who is he?

Alice: (*Shocked.*) Oh, Mr. Benham!

Benham: (*Relenting.*) Good in his own line, I admit. Personality, push, *jer ner sais kwar,* as the French put it—possibly. But who is he? What's his family?

Alice: Well, there's only Mr. Jack, of course.

Benham: (*Contemptuously.*) Mr. Jack isn't "family," my girl. Mr. Jack is "hissue." Not but what Mr. Jack is very well in his way. Eton and Oxford—I've nothing to say against that, though I prefer Cambridge myself. But who's the family? Broxopp! There isn't such a family.

Alice: Well, but I'm sure he's very rich. Mr. Benham.

Benham: Rich, yes, but what does he *do* with his money? Does he hunt or shoot? Does he entertain? Has he got a country-house?

Alice: (*Sticking to it.*) I'm sure you couldn't find a nicer gentleman than Sir Roger Tenterden who lives next door, and came to dinner here only last Tuesday with his daughter. And as to a country-house, well, some likes London, and some likes the country, and it's just according.

Benham: Tenterden? Ah, now that *is* family, my girl. That's the best I've heard of your Mr. Broxopp as yet. But you mustn't stand talking here all the morning. Just go down and tell that young woman to wait until I send for her. They're used to waiting.

Alice: Yes, Mr. Benham.

Benham: Say that, if the opportunity occurs, I will do my best to persuade Mr. Broxopp to give her a few minutes of his time.

Alice: Yes, Mr. Benham.

Benham: But that it will be useless for her to expect me to divulge any of the secrets of His Grace's household, such as are naturally known to me. Tell her that my lips are sealed.

Alice: (*Awed.*) Yes, Mr. Benham.

(*Alice goes out.*)

Benham: (*Picking up hat delicately and putting it down again.*) One hat—and what a hat!

(*Broxopp comes in. Very much the Broxopp that we know, though his hair, moustache and beard are greying slightly, and his face is more lined. He still wears a broad-tailed coat and a spreading blue tie, though he probably pays more for them nowadays.*)

Broxopp: Well, Benham, what is it?

Benham: A gentleman rang up, your Grace—I beg your pardon—"Sir," I should have said.

Broxopp: Call me your Grace if it's any comfort to you, Benham.

Benham: Thank you, sir.

Broxopp: Settling down all right?

Benham: I am quite comfortable, sir, thank you.

Broxopp: I'm afraid you feel that you have come down in the world?

Benham: In a sense, yes, sir.

Broxopp: Well, you'll have to climb up again, Benham, that's all. Did you ever read a little book—you can get it at all bookstalls—called "Broxoppiana?"

Benham: In a general way, sir, I read nothing later than Lord Lytton.

Broxopp: (*Genially.*) Well, this is by Lord Broxopp—a few suggestive thoughts that have occurred to me from time to time—with photography. On page 7, I say this: "Going there is better fun than getting there." I've got there, Benham. You're just going there again. I envy you.

Benham: Thank you, sir . . . I wonder if I might take the liberty of asking your advice, sir, in a matter of some importance to myself.

Broxopp: Why not?

Benham: Thank you, sir.

Broxopp: What is it? You want to get married?

Benham: (*Shocked.*) Heaven forbid, sir.

Broxopp: Well, Benham, I've been married twenty-five years, and I've never regretted it.

Benham: I suppose one soon gets used to it, sir. What I wanted to take your advice about, sir, was a little financial matter in which I am interested.

Broxopp: Oh! . . . I'm not sure that you're wise, Benham.

Benham: Wise, sir?

Broxopp: In asking my advice about little financial matters. I lost five thousand myself last month.

Benham: (*Alarmed.*) Not in West Africans, I trust, sir?

Broxopp: God knows what it was in. Jack said they were going up.

Benham: I'm sure I'm sorry to hear it, sir.

Broxopp: You needn't be. That sort of thing doesn't worry me, (*With a snap of the fingers.*) that much. I'd sooner lose five thousand on the Stock Exchange than lose one customer who might have bought a five shilling bottle of Broxopp's Beans and didn't. I'm not a financier, Benham. I take no interest in money for its own sake. It's no good consulting me about your investments; I can only give you two pieces of advice. One—get married. Two—if you have any children, bring them up on Broxopp's Beans.

Benham: Thank you, sir. I am afraid I shall be unable to follow your advice, sir; particularly in the matter of the children. Children, I have noticed, are invariably disappointing when they grow up.

Broxopp: (*Thoughtfully.*) I suppose they are, Benham . . . I suppose they are. (*Putting his thought away suddenly.*) Well, I'm sorry I can't help you. You should speak to Sir Roger the next time he comes to dinner. He's gone into the City lately, and I dare say he can put you on to a good thing.

Benham: Thank you, sir. It would be very condescending of him. Would you like me to brush your hat, sir?

Broxopp: I should like you to tell me who this gentleman was who rang up.

Benham: Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. A Mr. Morris. He wishes you to communicate with him this morning, sir, if convenient.

Broxopp: Morris? Ridiculous fellow. All right, Benham.

Benham: Thank you, sir.

(*He picks up the hat and goes out as Broxopp goes to the telephone.*)

Broxopp: (*At telephone.*) Central 99199 . . . yes . . .Is Mr. Morris in? Broxopp speaking . . . Yes . . . Hullo, is that you, Mr. Morris? Broxopp speaking . . . Yes, I've got your letter . . . Oh, no, no, no, I don't care how good the offer is. I don't want to sell . . . Well, you see, I happen to be interested in Broxopp's Beans . . . Yes, yes, of course, but I mean artistically interested. It's my work, Morris; it's what I live for. I am much too fond of it to want to share it with anybody . . . Well, my son will join me some day, I hope, but no companies for *me* . . . That's final, Morris . . . Well, look here, if your man is as keen as all that to buy Broxopp's Beans I'll tell you what I'll do.

(*He looks up at Mrs. Broxopp as she comes in,*

and nods affectionately to her, and then goes on speaking down the telephone.)

I'll let him have one of the large bottles for two and ninepence. Ha, ha, ha! (*Greatly pleased with himself.*) Good-bye, Mr. Morris. (*He puts back the receiver, and says to Mrs. Broxopp.*) Morris has a man who wants to buy Broxopp's Beans. I said I'd let him have one of the large bottles for two and ninepence. Rather good, Nancy, wasn't it? We must put it in the next edition of Broxoppiana. (*Thoughtfully.*) I'm not often funny. (*He kisses her hand and leads her to the sofa.*)

Nancy: Dear one . . . Aren't you going to the City this morning?

Broxopp: (*On the sofa with her.*) I don't know. There's not much to do just now. Besides (*Tapping his buttonhole.*) how could I go?

Nancy: (*Getting up.*) Oh, you baby. Have you been waiting for me to put that in? (*She goes to the bowl of carnations and takes one out.*)

Broxopp: Well, I couldn't go without it, could I? Broxopp without his pink carnation—what would they say in the City? And after you'd put it in for me for twenty years, how could I put it in for myself?

Nancy: (*Giving it the final touch.*) There!

Broxopp: (*Looking from it to her with a satisfied smile.*) Now then, give me a kiss, and perhaps I'll go.

Nancy: You're only a boy still, Jim; much younger than Jack.

Broxopp: Oh, Jack's just at the age when they're oldest. He'll grow out of it. Now then, what about that kiss?

Nancy: Keep young, Jim. (*She kisses him and he takes her in his arms.*)

(*Enter Benham noiselessly:*)

Benham: (*Addressing the ceiling.*) I beg your pardon, sir.

(*They disengage hastily.*)

But there's a young woman called from one of the newspapers. I think she desires an interview for the journal with which she is connected. Or something of that nature, sir. (*He hands Broxopp her card.*)

Broxopp: Ah, yes. Well, show her up then.

Benham: Yes, sir.

(*He goes out.*)

Broxopp: (*Indignantly.*) What I say is this, Nancy. If a man can't kiss his own wife, on his own sofa, without being interrupted, he isn't living in a home at all. He's living in an hotel. Now, I suppose that the dignified gentleman who has just left us despises us from the bottom of his heart. His Grace would never have been so vulgar as to kiss his *own* wife on the sofa.

Nancy: It doesn't matter very much, Jim, does it? And I expect we shall get used to him.

Broxopp: I don't know why we ever had the fellow—except that Master Jack thought it went better with Eton and Oxford. Eton and Oxford—was that your idea or mine?

Nancy: Yours, dear.

Broxopp: Oh! Well, the only thing they taught him there was that his father's tie was the wrong shape.

Nancy: (*Carried back as she looks up at the picture.*) There never was a better baby than Jack.

Broxopp: (*Looking at the picture too.*) Yes, he used to like my tie in those days. He was never so happy as when he was playing with it. Funny how

they change when they grow up. (*Looking at his watch.*) What are you doing this morning?

Nancy: (*Getting up.*) All right, darling. I'm going. I know you like being alone for interviews.

Broxopp: (*Going to the door with her.*) But you must come in, Nancy, at the end. That went well last time. (*Quoting.*) "Ah," said Mr. Broxopp, as a middle-aged but still beautiful woman glided into the room, "here is my wife. My wife," he went on, with a tender glance at the still beautiful woman, "to whom I owe all my success." As he said these words——

Nancy: Oh, I expect this one won't write that sort of rubbish.

Broxopp: Rubbish? I don't call that rubbish.

Nancy: Well, then, nonsense, darling. Only—I rather like nonsense.

(*Nancy goes out. Left alone, the Great Broxopp gets ready. He spreads out his tie, fingers his buttonhole and sees that a volume of Shakespeare is well displayed on the table. Then he sits down at his desk and is discovered by Miss Johns hard at it.*)

Benham: (*Announcing.*) Miss Johns.

(*Benham goes out, leaving Miss Johns behind; a nervous young woman of about thirty, with pince nez. But Broxopp is being too quick for her. He has whisked the receiver off, and is busy saying "Quite so," and "Certainly" to the confusion of the girl at the Exchange.*)

Broxopp: Sit down, Miss Johns, won't you? If you'll excuse me just a moment—(*Down the telephone.*) Yes . . . yes, certainly . . . Good-bye. (*He replaces the receiver and turns to her.*) Well, Miss Johns, and what can I do for you?

Miss Johns: (*Nervously.*) You saw my card, Mr. Broxopp?

Broxopp: Did I? Then where did I put it? You're from——?

Miss Johns: The Daily Gossip.

Broxopp: Yes, yes, of course. (*Encouragingly.*) And you—er——

(*He stands up, so that she can see him better, and leans against the mantelpiece. A little dazzled, she turns away, looks round the room for inspiration and catches sight of the picture.*)

Miss Johns: (*Impulsively.*) Oh, Mr. Broxopp, is that IT?

Broxopp: (*Trying not to be proud.*) My boy Jack —Eton and Oxford—when he was a baby. You've seen the posters, of course.

Miss Johns: Who hasn't, Mr. Broxopp?

Broxopp: I always say I owe half my success to Jack. He was the first Broxopp baby—and now there are a million of them. I don't know whether—er—you——?

Miss Johns: (*Coyly.*) Oh, you flatter me, Mr. Broxopp. I'm afraid I was born a little too soon.

Broxopp: A pity, a pity. But no doubt your relations——

Miss Johns: Oh, yes, my nephews and nieces—they are all Broxopp babies. And then I have always felt specially interested in Broxopp's Beans, Mr. Broxopp, because I live in (*archly*) in Bloomsbury, Mr. Broxopp.

Broxopp: Really? When my wife (*He looks towards the door in case she should be choosing that very opportune moment to come in.*) to whom I owe all my success—when my wife and I were first married——

Miss Johns: (*Eagerly.*) I know, Mr. Broxopp. You see, that's what makes me so interested. I live at Number 26, too, in the floor below.

Broxopp: Now, now, do you really? Well, I declare. That's very curious.

Miss Johns: I've only been there the last few months. But the very first thing they told me when I took the room was that *the* Mr. Broxopp had begun his career in that house.

Broxopp: (*Pleased.*) Ah, they remember! . . . Yes, that was where I began. There was a man called Thomson . . . but you wouldn't be interested in *him.* He dropped out very soon. He had no faith. I paid him well—I was too generous, my wife said. But it was worth it to be alone. Ah, Miss Johns, you see me now in my beautiful home, surrounded by pictures, books—(*He picks up the Shakespeare and reads the title.*) "The Works of Shakespeare" (*And puts it down again.*)—costly furniture—all that money can buy. And perhaps you envy me. Yet I think I was happier in those old days at Bloomsbury when I was fighting for my life . . . Did you ever read a little book called "Broxoppiana"?

Miss Johns: Now, isn't that funny, Mr. Broxopp? I bought it only last Saturday when I was going down to my brother's in the country.

Broxopp: Well, you may remember how I say, "Going there is better fun than getting there." It's true, Miss Johns.

Miss Johns: (*Proud of knowing it.*) Didn't Stevenson say something like that?

Broxopp: (*Firmly.*) Not in my hearing.

Miss Johns: I mean the Stevenson. I think he said, "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive."

Broxopp: Yes—well, that's another way of putting it. To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive. So Stevenson found it out, too, did he? Well, he was right . . . All those years when I was building up BROXOPP'S Beans I was happy, really happy. I'm a fighter. I like taking the Public by the throat and making them look at me. That's over now. I've got 'em almost too tame. They come and eat the Beans out of my hand. And though my success has given me something—a comfortable home—servants to wait upon me —butlers and what not—the best authors to read—(*He picks up the Shakespeare and puts it down again.*)—even a son from Eton and Oxford to gladden my old heart—yet I miss something. I miss the struggle of those early days when my dear wife and I (*He has another look at the door just in case.*) set out together hand in hand to beat the world. (*Sighing.*) Ah, well! (*In a business-like voice.*) Now what can I tell you about myself, Miss Johns? Pray, don't be afraid of making any notes that you like.

Miss Johns: I shall remember what you said, Mr. Broxopp, without taking any notes.

Broxopp: Ah, well, you must please yourself about that. (*Looking at his watch.*) Now then, I'm waiting for you.

Miss Johns: I—— (*She hesitates.*)

Broxopp: (*Kindly.*) Perhaps you're not used to interviewing? This is the first time you've done it, eh?

Miss Johns: Well, I don't do it, as a rule. And I'm afraid——

Broxopp: Well, perhaps I can help you with it. You must send me your manuscript. My wife (*He looks at the door hopefully.*) to whom I owe so much, was my first interviewer—ah, that was many years ago. She picked up a guinea for it, but that wasn't

the important thing. It was the publicity. "A Talk with one of our Commercial Princes"—and we were still in those three little rooms in Bloomsbury, and every penny we made went back into the business. One of our Commercial Princes—I don't suppose the Editor had ever even heard of me. (*Chuckling.*) Ah, but we bluffed him. Lord, how we piled it on. " 'Tell me, Mr. Broxopp,' I said—" that was my wife. "Mr. Broxopp leant against his marble mantelpiece—" that was me—"and fingered the well-known Broxopp tie—" (*Indicating it*) same one as this. "Ah, my dear boy, he said—" The dear boy was my wife of course—she signed herself N. R. Chillingham, her maiden name; you women weren't so popular on the Press in those days—we pretended she was a man. "Ah, my dear boy, he said, and I shall never forget the look which came over his rugged face—" my wife didn't like rugged but I insisted; sounded more like a commercial prince—" 'there is only one secret of success and that is hard work.' " Mind you, I don't believe it —imagination is much more important. But they liked it in those days. Hard work. It sounded well, and woke up all the office boys; made 'em work like the devil. No good telling an office boy that imagination is the thing—not while he's working for *you.* (*With a sigh.*) Ah, well, those days are over. Happy days! The world seems to have grown up since then. (*Looking at his watch.*) Well, Miss Johns?

Miss Johns: (*Very nervous.*) Mr. Broxopp, I don't know how to tell you. I didn't really come to interview at all to-day, I——

Broxopp: (*Staggered.*) But your card——

Miss Johns: Oh, I am on the press, and please, Mr. Broxopp, I shall certainly write an article—perhaps two articles—about what you've told me, and I do

live in the house where you used to live, and I was so interested in you, but—— (*She hesitates.*)

Broxopp: (*Mollified by the two articles.*) Well?

Miss Johns: (*Making another effort.*) You see, I used to live with my brother in the country. And he has a small farm. And then I came to London. And he has invented a chicken food and it's so good, and I told him I'd ask you if—— You see, I felt that I knew you because of where I lived—I wondered—(*Taking the plunge.*) Mr. Broxopp, did you ever think of doing anything besides Broxopp's Beans?

Broxopp: (*Nodding to himself.*) You wondered if I'd take up this food? Put it on the market? Boom it?

Miss Johns: Oh, yes!

(*He thinks it over and then shakes his head slowly.*)

Broxopp: You're too late, Miss Johns.

Miss Johns: Oh, has somebody else——

Broxopp: Twenty-four years too late. Now, if you'd come to me twenty-four years ago——

Miss Johns: But I was only six then. (*Hastily.*) I mean, about six.

Broxopp: Yes, if you'd come to me then—— (*Thoughtfully.*) Broxopp's Beans for Brahmas—Yes, I would have made that go. But not now. It wouldn't be fair to the babies. I couldn't do 'em both justice. No, Miss Johns, I'm not a financier. I'm not a company promoter. I want to put all of myself into anything I take up, and I couldn't do that now. (*Regretfully.*) Perhaps if you—(*Firmly.*) No, Miss Johns. (*More to himself than to her.*) You see, Broxopp's Beans for Babies—it isn't just my living, it's my whole life.

Miss Johns: (*Getting up.*) I'm afraid I oughtn't to have mentioned it.

Broxopp: Oh, that's all right. You'll never get on if you don't mention things. (*Shaking hands.*) Well, good-bye. Mind, I shall expect to see that article—Two, didn't you say? And if there's anything else you want to know—(*He stops beneath the picture on his way with her to the door.*) A pretty baby, wasn't he?

Miss Johns: Lovely!

Broxopp: Yes, my wife and I—(*The door begins to open.*) Ah, here she is. (*He keeps his attention on the picture.*) Nancy, we were just looking—— Hullo, Jack!

Jack: (*Coming in.*) Sorry. Are you engaged? (*He sees them beneath that beastly picture, and a look of resigned despair comes into his face—he shrugs his shoulders.*)

Broxopp: (*To Miss Johns.*) My boy Jack. Eton and Oxford.

(*And he looks it, too—except perhaps for his hair, which is just a little more in keeping with his artistic future than his educational past.*)

Miss Johns: (*Now completely upset.*) How do you do? It's so nice to see the—I mean, we were just looking—but I mustn't keep you, Mr. Broxopp—and thank you so much, and I'm so sorry that you—but of course I quite understand. Good-bye! Good-bye!

(*Miss Johns hurries out.*)

Jack: (*Strolling towards the sofa.*) Bit nervous, isn't she?

Broxopp: You frightened her.

Jack: (*Sitting down.*) Fleet Street—and all that?

Broxopp: Yes. (*Looking round the room.*) Where's my hat?

Jack: I say, you're not going?

Broxopp: Must. Got to work, Jack. (*Looking at him mischievously.*) When are you going to begin?

Jack: (*Airily.*) Oh, as soon as I've got the studio fixed up.

Broxopp: You still want to be an artist?

Jack: Well, dash it, I've only just begun wanting. You've had twenty-five years of Broxopp's Beans—and—and I suppose you still want to go on, don't you?

Broxopp: (*Smiling.*) Well, that's true. Where's my hat?

Jack: No, look here, don't go yet.

Broxopp: Must, my boy.

Jack: Now, what on earth do you suppose is going to happen if you leave the Beans alone for one morning? Are all the babies going to die?

Broxopp: What would happen if you were in the middle of a picture and left it alone for a morning? Nothing. But you might be keen enough to want to go on with it.

Jack: Well, I might be afraid of losing the inspiration, I suppose.

Broxopp: Exactly. So might I. What's that confounded fellow done with my hat?

Jack: (*Seriously alarmed.*) I say—have you really got a new inspiration? I—I suppose *I* don't come into it? (*He jerks his thumb towards the picture.*)

Broxopp: Not this time.

Jack: (*Fervently.*) Thank the Lord . . . I say, never mind about that beastly hat. You've got to stay at home this morning. I want to talk to you.

Broxopp: (*Looking up from his search.*) Hullo, Boy, what's the matter?

Jack: I say, do sit down—I keep losing sight of you.

(*Broxopp sits down obediently.*)

That's better.

Broxopp: Well?

Jack: (*Defensively.*) Well?

Broxopp: What's happened?

Jack: What do you mean—happened?

Broxopp: Well, what is it you want to tell me?

Jack: I didn't say I wanted to tell you anything. I just said, "Let's have a talk." I don't see why a father and a son shouldn't have a little talk together sometimes.

Broxopp: (*Gladly.*) Neither do I, Jack. Only I thought perhaps it wasn't done. Bad form and all that.

Jack: Oh, rot!

Broxopp: You see, I don't want you to be ashamed of me.

Jack: (*Uneasily.*) I say, I wish you wouldn't talk like that.

Broxopp: Oh, but I mean it. You see, I'm very proud of *you,* Jack.

Jack: I'm blessed if I know why you should be. I haven't done anything yet.

Broxopp: Oh, yes, you have. You've called me "Father" sometimes when other people have been there. That doesn't sound much, perhaps, but it makes me proud.

Jack: (*With a smile.*) You're much prouder of your blessed beans, aren't you? Own up.

Broxopp: Well, you were born about the same time, but I've always had more control over the beans.

Jack: I say, you aren't still sick because I don't want to come into the business?

Broxopp: I was only saying a few minutes ago that children are invariably disappointing when they grow up. It isn't their fault. I dare say that we are just as disappointing to our children. When they are young they think we are wonderful; so wise, so strong, so good. And then they grow up and—find us out. So if you don't want to come into the business, and do want to be an artist, I'm not "sick," even if I *am* disappointed. But I dare say I shall get over it.

Jack: (*Nervously.*) You know, I rather wonder sometimes, now that we've decided that I'm not going into it, that you don't chuck it yourself, and retire into the country. It's worth a good bit I should think, if you did want to sell it.

Broxopp: (*Jokingly.*) Would you invest the money for me?

Jack: (*With a smile.*) Well, I own I had a bit of rotten luck last time, but I dare say I'd do it as well as you would.

Broxopp: That's not saying much. I don't profess to watch the markets.

Jack: Neither do I, only young Archie happened to say that he'd heard from a man whose uncle knew a fellow who— Well, it just didn't come off, that's all. But Sir Roger knows all about that sort of thing. He'd do it for you.

Broxopp: Well, if I ever do want to sell it, I dare say I'll consult Sir Roger, but that won't be for a long time yet. (*He gets up.*) Well——

Jack: (*Jumping up hastily.*) No, look here, you mustn't go yet. We've only just begun to talk. (*Pushing him back into his chair.*) That's right.

Broxopp: (*Good-humouredly.*) Is this a conspiracy to keep me away from the office, or what?

Jack: (*Plunging at it.*) Dad, you see before you the happiest man in the world——

Broxopp: (*Surprised.*) Oh!

Jack: Only, it's dashed difficult. (*Having another shot.*) What do you think Mother's doing at this moment?

Broxopp: Just what I've been wondering. I wanted her in here.

Jack: Yes, well, she's upstairs, introducing herself to her future daughter-in-law.

Broxopp: Jack! Who?

Jack: Iris Tenterden. (*But he can't help being self-conscious about it.*)

Broxopp: (*Eagerly.*) My dearest Jack! So that's what you've been trying to get out all this time! (*He comes forward with both hands held out.*) But I'm delighted!

Jack: (*More moved than he means to show.*) Thanks, Dad!

Broxopp: (*Pulling himself up humorously.*) Tut, tut, I was forgetting. (*Formally.*) May I congratulate you, Mr. Broxopp.

Jack: (*Smiling.*) Silly old ass!

Broxopp: (*Sitting on the sofa with him.*) But this is wonderful news. Why aren't you more excited? (*Apologetically.*) I mean as excited as Eton and Oxford will permit?

Jack: You do like her?

Broxopp: Certainly. She has a way of—a way of—Well, I can't put it into words, Jack, but she's the only one of your friends who has told me frankly that she doesn't like my tie. The others try to convey the impression that I'm not wearing a tie at all—that I am in Holy Orders, or if not in Holy Orders, have a very large beard which—(*He indicates with his hand how such a beard would completely cover his tie.*)

Jack: Well, but your tie is a bit—well, *you* know, I mean frankly, isn't it?

Broxopp: (*Smiling.*) Yes, but so am I a bit—well, *you* know, I mean frankly, aren't I? It I hadn't been, you would never have gone to Eton and Oxford. But don't think I don't like Iris. I do—immensely. Well, if you're as happy together as Nancy and I have been, you'll do. Twenty-five years, Jack, and I always say that——

Jack: Good old Dad. She's a ripper, isn't she?

Broxopp: (*Nodding to himself.*) She'll do you a lot of good. But tell me more about it. When did you first discover that she was—a ripper?

Jack: Oh, months ago, but we only fixed it up at that dance last night. I pushed round this morning to see Sir Roger and talk things over. He's coming round for a pow-wow directly.

Broxopp: My boy married! And it seems only yesterday that your Mother and I were just beginning to keep house together, and there was no Jack at all.

Jack: Well, of course, it seems longer ago than that to me.

Broxopp: (*Looking at the picture.*) "I am a Broxopp baby, are you?" Perhaps one of these days——

Jack: Steady on, Dad. You're not going to talk to Iris like that, I hope.

Broxopp: (*With a laugh.*) I shall be strictly proper and respectable, my boy. Not a word shall escape my lips of which you would disapprove.

Jack: You know what I mean. When a young girl has only just got engaged, you don't want to start talking about——

Broxopp: (*Gravely.*) Say no more. And so Sir Roger is coming round too, is he?

Jack: Yes.

Broxopp: What does *he* say about it?

Jack: (*Knowing that it's got to come now.*) Well, that's just it. You see Iris and I—I mean he and I—well, of course I always thought so—I mean I don't want you to think that Iris—though naturally she agrees with me—well, we think, I mean I think—oh, thank the Lord—here *is* Iris.

(*Iris comes in with Nancy—tall, cool, confident with something of the boy in her; utterly honest and unafraid. But even if you don't like these qualities, you forgive her because she is lovely.*)

Nancy: Jack's told you, Jim?

Broxopp: Yes, the rascal, Iris! (*He holds out his hands to her.*)

Iris: (*Taking them.*) Daddy Broxopp! Bend down.

(*He bends towards her and she kisses him gently on the forehead.*)

There! You don't mind being called Daddy Broxopp! Nancy doesn't mind; I mean being called Nancy. I've been talking it over with her, and she's going to let me call her Nancy because she's so young and pretty.

Broxopp: (*Enjoying it.*) And I'm not young and pretty?

Iris: No, you're middle-aged and Broxoppy. It's a nice thing to be.

Broxopp: (*Taking her hands again.*) Thank you for thinking her young and pretty.

Nancy: I don't feel very young, with a big son wanting to get married.

Iris: He? He's only a baby. (*She blows a kiss to the picture.*)

Jack: (*Resigned.*) Oh, Lord!

Broxopp: Well, Iris, if you're as happy together as Nancy and I have been, you'll do. Twenty-five years we have been married and I always say that if it hadn't been for Nancy——

Nancy: (*Stopping him.*) Yes, dear.

Iris: If it hadn't been for Nancy, there wouldn't have been a Jack for me to marry.

Broxopp: Well, that's true . . . And now, what does Sir Roger say about it?

(*Jack and Iris look at each other.*)

Hullo, he does say something about it?

Nancy: I think we'd better sit down, darling, and ——(*She leads the way to the sofa.*)

(*They sit down.*)

Broxopp: Well, what is it? Jack's been trying to get something out for the last five minutes.

Iris: Jack, you're a coward. I wasn't. I told Nancy.

Jack: Oh, all right then . . . Look here, Dad, you'll think me a beast for what I'm going to say, but I want you and Mother to understand that it's not just a sudden idea put into my head by—(*He looks at Iris*

and goes on.) by Sir Roger, but it's what I've felt for years.

Broxopp: Well?

(*Nancy takes his hand and presses it.*)

Jack: Well then—I'm—I'm——(*From the heart.*) Well, I'm simply *fed up* with Broxopp's Beans.

Broxopp: (*Surprised.*) But—but you haven't had them since you were a baby.

Jack: (*Seeing the opening.*) Haven't had them? Have I ever stopped having them? Weren't they rammed down my throat at school till I was sick of them? Did they ever stop pulling my leg about them at Oxford? Can I go anywhere without seeing that beastly poster—a poster of me—me, if you please—practically naked—telling everybody that I love my Beans. (*Bitterly.*) *Love* them! Don't I see my name—Broxopp, Broxopp, Broxopp—everywhere in every size of lettering—on every omnibus, on every hoarding; spelt out in three colours at night—B-R-O-X-O-P-P—until I can hardly bear the sight of it. Free bottles given away on my birthday, free holidays for Broxopp mothers to celebrate my coming of age! I'm not a man at all. I'm just a living advertisement of Beans.

Broxopp: (*Quietly.*) I think that's putting it a little too strongly, Jack.

Nancy presses his hand and strokes it gently.

Jack: I know it is, but that's how I've felt sometimes. Of course I know that if it hadn't been for Broxopp, I'd be sitting on a high stool and lucky to earn thirty bob a week. But you must see my side of it, Dad. I want to paint. How can anyone called Broxopp be taken seriously as an artist? How can I make any sort of name with all those Beans and babies overshadowing me and keeping me out of the light? I

don't say I'm ever going to be a great painter, but how do I stand a chance as things are? "Have you seen the new Broxopp"? What's that going to mean to anybody? Not that I've painted a picture, but that you've brought out a new-sized bottle, or a full strength for Invalids, or something.

Broxopp: I think you exaggerate, Jack.

Jack: I know I do. But you can't get over it that it's going to be pretty rotten for me. It's always been rotten for *me*—and now it's going to be rotten for Iris.

Broxopp: Is it, Iris? You'd tell me the truth, I know.

Iris: I want to marry Jack, Daddy Broxopp. But I don't want to marry the Beans. I told Nancy so.

Nancy: (*To Broxopp.*) I do understand, dear.

Jack: I don't want you to think that Iris put this into my head. It's always been there.

Iris: (*Frankly.*) I expect I brought it out, though.

Broxopp: And what does Sir Roger say about it?

Jack: (*Bitterly.*) Sir Roger says that his grandson is not going to have a name that every Tom, Dick and Harry gapes at on the hoardings.

Iris: I ought to explain that Jack wants to marry *me,* not Father's way of expressing himself. I told Father so.

Jack: Still, you do see his—well, our point of view? Don't you, Dad?

Nancy: Oh yes, dear.

Broxopp: Certainly, my boy.

Jack: (*Relieved.*) Good man. I thought you would.

Broxopp: (*Getting up.*) The only thing I'm won-

dering is whether there is any chance of your seeing mine.

Jack: (*Surprised.*) Yours?

Broxopp: (*On his own hearth—The Great Broxopp —but speaking quietly.*) I was educated at a Board school, Iris—I dare say you've noticed it. I used to drop my aitches—I don't think you've noticed that—Nancy got me out of it. I wear funny clothes—partly because it is in keeping with the name I have made for myself; partly, I dare say, because I've got no taste. But, you see, at fourteen, the age at which Jack went to Eton, I was earning my own living. I took a resolve then. I told myself that one day I would make my name of Broxopp, famous. I made it famous. My name; Broxopp. Well, that's all. That's my point of view. But don't think I don't see yours.

(*Iris looks at him wonderingly and then goes over and kisses Nancy.*)

Iris: (*Sitting by Nancy's side.*) You must be very, very proud of him.

Nancy: I am, dear; he knows it.

Jack: (*Miserably.*) Well, of course, when you talk like that, you only make me feel an utter beast.

Iris: (*With a sigh.*) The only thing is that the utter beast feeling might pass off. Whereas the feeling about Broxopp's Beans never will. It's a rotten thing to say, but I expect it's true.

(*There is a moment's silence, broken by the arrival of Sir Roger Tenterden. He is a magnificent looking man, with a military moustache and tight-fitting black tail coat with a light waistcoat. His manner is superb—the sort of manner that can borrow a thousand pounds from anybody and leave the creditor*

with the feeling that he has had a favour conferred upon him. He is an intense egotist, although his company does not always realise it.

The three Broxopps are distinctly over-awed by him; Jack, of course, less than the other two.)

Benham: (*Enjoying it.*) Sir Roger Tenterden!

(*Exit Benham.*)

Tenterden: How do you do, Mrs.—ah—Broxopp. (*Metaphorically they all stand to attention.*)

Nancy: How do you do, Sir Roger?

Tenterden: How do, Broxopp? Ah, Jack—Iris.

Nancy: Where will you sit, Sir Roger?

Tenterden: Don't trouble, I beg you. (*The best chair is ready for him.*) I shall be all right here. (*He sits down.*) You will forgive me for intruding upon you in the morning, but having just heard the great news—well, we must congratulate each other—eh, Mrs. Broxopp? (*He smiles pleasantly at her.*)

Nancy: (*Smiling too.*) Indeed, we must.

Broxopp: (*Flattered.*) That's very good of you, Sir Roger. I need hardly say how delighted I am that Jack and—er—your Iris should have——

Tenterden: Quite so, quite so. Well, they've fixed it up between themselves without consulting *us,* Mrs. Broxopp—quite right too, eh, Iris?—eh, Jack—(*He gives them his pleasant smile.*)—but we old people must come in at the end and have *our say.* Eh, Broxopp?

Broxopp: Very glad to talk over anything you like, Sir Roger—. Of course, I should give Jack a suitable allowance——

Tenterden: (*Holding up a protesting hand.*) Ah,

well—that—I—have no doubt whatever—I too would see that my daughter—but all that can be arranged later. That goes without saying. But naturally there are also other matters which will require to be discussed. I don't know if Jack——

Iris: You mean about the Beans? I told Daddy Broxopp.

Tenterden: (*Blankly.*) You told—ah?

Iris: (*Indicating Broxopp.*) Daddy Broxopp.

Broxopp: (*With a proud smile.*) What she is pleased to call me, Sir Roger.

Tenterden: Oh—ah—yes. Quite so. Well there, we all understand the position. (*With his pleasant smile.*) That clears the ground, doesn't it, Mrs. Broxopp?

Nancy: It's much better to have things out.

Tenterden: You put it admirably. It was with that purpose that I came round this morning. Jack had given me a hint of his feelings and—well, naturally, I had my feelings, too. It is a matter which, after all, concerns me very closely.

Broxopp: (*Puzzled.*) Yes?

Tenterden: Surely, my dear Broxopp! Iris's child, Jack's child, would be—*my* grandson!

Iris: (*To Broxopp.*) Father always looks well ahead. They have to in the City—don't they, father?

Tenterden: (*Kindly.*) My dear Iris, we have to do many things in the City, as Mr. Broxopp knows——

Broxopp: Oh, I know nothing of your part of the City. I'm not a financier. It's no good coming to *me* for a good investment.

Tenterden: (*With a bow.*) Then may I hope that you will come to *me* if ever you should want one?

Broxopp: (*Taken aback.*) Thank you. It's very good of you, Sir Roger.

Tenterden: Not at all. But I was saying that we need not talk about the City now. In all walks of life we have to look ahead. And I have to ask myself this, Mrs. Broxopp. Is "Roger Broxopp" a desirable name for my grandson, in the circumstances?

Iris: (*To Jack.*) Father's got as far as the christening now. I shall have another baby directly.

Jack: (*Miserably.*) I wish he wouldn't.

Broxopp: I see your point of view, Sir Roger. Don't think that I don't see it.

Tenterden: (*Bowing.*) That is very generous of you. And I think it is important. There is—ah—a poster to which my attention has naturally been called, saying—ah—"I am a Broxopp—ah—baby, are you?" I think—(*He looks enquiringly at Broxopp.*)

Broxopp: That's right, Sir Roger. I thought of that twenty-five years ago. Do you remember, Nancy?

Nancy: (*Pressing his hand.*) I remember, Jim.

Tenterden: An excellent poster for its purpose, I have no doubt, Mrs. Broxopp. An excellent picture, no doubt, of Master Jack at that age. (*He smiles at Jack.*) But seeing that all babies are pretty much alike——

Nancy: (*Quickly.*) Oh no!

Tenterden: (*With a charming bow.*) Who would contradict a woman on such a question? Let me say rather that since, to the undiscerning male, all babies are alike, there would be the danger, the very serious danger, that people might suppose the words beneath the picture to have been uttered by—(*he pauses dramatically.*) my grandson!

Iris: Roger Broxopp.

Tenterden: Exactly. A Broxopp baby. (*To Broxopp.*) Of course I am saying nothing against the food, which is, I am sure, admirably suited for its purpose. I am merely looking at the matter in the interests of—my grandson.

Broxopp: Quite so, Sir Roger, quite so. You see that, Nancy?

Nancy: Oh yes, dear.

Tenterden: Well, my friend Jack has been talking it over with me. I think we agree that (*to Nancy*) for Mr. Broxopp to retire from the business—and I am sure he has well earned his rest after all these years of strenuous work—for him to retire and settle down in the country, would not altogether meet the case. The name of Broxopp would continue with the business—one could not get away from it. (*To Broxopp.*) I think I am right in saying that?

Broxopp: Undoubtedly, Sir Roger. The name *is* the business.

Tenterden: That was my view. So our friend Jack and I think that something more must be done. A question merely of another name. He has suggested, my dear Mrs. Broxopp, (*with a bow*) your name, Chillingham.

Broxopp: I don't quite understand.

Tenterden: Merely that you should start your new life—freed from the cares of business—as—ah—Chillingham.

Broxopp: Oh!

Iris: (*To herself.*) Roger Chillingham.

Tenterden: (*Charmingly to Nancy.*) A name I should be proud for my grandson to bear. I seem to remember a Chillingham in the Coldstream with me years ago. Are yours military people?

Nancy: Oh yes. My father was a sergeant-major in the Wiltshire's.

Tenterden: (*Bearing it gallantly.*) Ah! A younger branch, no doubt. But it is a good name, Chillingham. After all, why should the wife always take the husband's name? Eh, Mrs. Broxopp? Why should not the husband take the wife's, the son take the mother's . . . Jack Chillingham to Iris Tenterden. And a handsome couple, are they not? I shall be proud of my grandson.

Iris: (*Amused, as always, by her father.*) Say something, Jack. A few words of thanks.

Tenterden: You agree with me, Jack?

Jack: (*Mumbling.*) I've been telling father.

Broxopp: Of course, I quite see your point of view, Sir Roger. Don't think that I don't see it perfectly. *You* see it, don't you, Nancy?

Nancy: Oh yes, dear. I should be very proud for you to take my name. Just as I was very proud to take yours.

Tenterden: Charmingly put, Mrs. Broxopp. But alas! It is no longer your husband's name. He has been too generous with it. He has given it to the world. That is what I have to think of—for my grandson. (*He gets up.*) Well, Mrs. Broxopp, I have to thank you for listening to me so courteously, and I need not tell you how glad I am that we see eye to eye in this matter. Broxopp, we must have a talk some day in the City. And if I can be of any assistance to you in the matter of your investments, or in any other particular, pray regard me as entirely at your service.

Broxopp: It's very good of you, Sir Roger.

Tenterden: Not at all. Jack, you're dining with us tonight, I understand. If you can spare him, Mrs. Broxopp. Well, I must get along to the City. Busy

times just now. Good-bye, and again my apologies for interrupting your morning.

Nancy: Good-bye, Sir Roger. (*She rings the bell.*)

Tenterden: Then I shall be seeing you one of these days, Broxopp. Good-bye!

(*He goes beautifully out.*
There is silence after he has gone. The Broxopps are a little overwhelmed.
Then Broxopp goes over to the fireplace, and stands with his back to it. In this position he feels more like himself.)

Broxopp: Well, Jack?

(*Jack says nothing. Iris goes over to Nancy and sits beside her.*)

Iris: (*To Nancy.*) He's a little overwhelming, isn't he? But you get used to it—and then you aren't overwhelmed.

Nancy: (*Shaking her head at Iris.*) Iris!

Iris: Nancy thinks I'm too modern. She's afraid that when we go out together, everybody will say, "What a very fast creature, Mrs. Broxopp's elder sister is!"

Broxopp: Mrs. Chillingham's elder sister, isn't it?

Iris: So it is, Daddy Chillingham.

Jack: (*Getting firmly to his feet.*) Look here, Dad, if you don't change yours, I don't change mine. But if you think you have given the beans a good run for their money, and you like to sell out and settle down in the country as Chillingham, well, I'll say thank you. Iris and I have got precious little right to ask it, and Sir Roger has got no right at all——

Iris: (*Rising and protesting in the Tenterden manner.*) Surely, my dear Broxopp, I have a right to consider—my grandson!

Jack: Shut up, Iris, for a moment—no right at all, but—but I'll thank you. Only I'm not going to be Chillingham while you and mother are Broxopp. I've made up my mind about that.

Iris: (*Taking his arm.*) And I'm not going to be Tenterden, while all of you are Chillingham, I've made up my mind about that.

Broxopp: Is there any reason why I shouldn't keep on the business as Chillingham?

Jack: (*Doubtfully.*) N—no.

Iris: As long as you make Jack a good allowance.

Jack: Shut up, Iris.

Iris: Well, that's what it comes to, darling. We may as well be honest about it.

Nancy: (*To Iris.*) Don't make it too hard for him. And of course Jim will make him an allowance until his painting brings him in enough for both of you.

Broxopp: (*After a pause.*) Jack, does Eton and Oxford allow you to kiss Iris sometimes?

Iris: *I* allow him to.

Broxopp: Well, there's an empty drawing-room upstairs. You will probably be interrupted by a gentleman called Benham who has a way of coming in where he's not wanted. But if you tell him your aren't married to each other he won't mind.

Jack: (*Awkwardly.*) Oh, it's all right—very decent of you, but——

Iris: (*Getting up and taking him firmly by the arm.*) Come along.

Jack: Yes, but hadn't we better——

Iris: Jack, do you really think Daddy Broxopp is being tactful?

Jack: Well, of course it's——

Iris: Oh, my dear we aren't the only pair of lovers in the house. Can't you see that *they* want to be alone?

Jack: (*Stuttering.*) Oh—oh!

(*She leads him away.*)

Broxopp: (*Smiling.*) She'll teach you a lot, my boy.

Iris: (*Stopping beneath the picture with the unwilling Jack.*) Good-bye, Baby Broxopp!

(*She blows a kiss to it and they go out. Broxopp goes over to his wife and sits on the sofa with her. She takes his hand.*)

Nancy: Darling, do you mind very much?

Broxopp: I wonder if Jack's painting is ever going to come to anything.

Nancy: He must find that out for himself, mustn't he? We can't help him.

Broxopp: Iris is a fine girl; I like a girl who tells the truth.

Nancy: (*Smiling to herself.*) I don't think you'd have liked her to write your advertisements.

Broxopp: (*Chuckling.*) Well done, Nancy. You've got me there.

Nancy: Say you liked me doing them.

Broxopp: (*Gravely.*) I liked you doing them. I've liked everything you've ever done for me . . . All the same, Nancy, we *were* truthful. (*After a pause.*) Artistically truthful. An artist is a man who knows what to leave out. Did I say that in Broxoppiana?

(*Remembering suddenly that there will never be another edition.*) Oh, well, it doesn't matter now.

Nancy: You won't mind very much? We've had our time. It's Jack's time now.

Broxopp: Yes, we've had our time. Twenty-five years. After all, we've had the best of the fun, Nancy. It's the going there, not the being there, that counts. Sir Roger is quite right about the name. It has been a handicap to Jack—I can see it now. It mustn't be a handicap to Jack's son.

Nancy: There's no reason why you shouldn't keep on with the business if you like.

Broxopp: (*Doubtfully.*) I don't think Sir Roger

Nancy: But it's for *you* to decide.

Broxopp: (*Jumping up.*) No, I'll do the thing handsomely! You didn't marry a baronet, Nancy, an old county name, but there's a Broxopp way as well as a Tenterden way. I do my things the Broxopp way, and the Great Broxopp is not the man for half-measures. We'll make a clean sweep of it all. We'll rest —you and I together in the country—Mr. and Mrs. Chillingham. You've given me everything, you won't mind giving me your name?

Nancy: (*Entranced by him.*) Jim, you *are* the Great Broxopp!

Broxopp: (*Entranced by himself.*) I am! (*He takes her hands and lifts her out of the sofa.*) Propose to me, Nancy!

Nancy: (*Putting her arms round him.*) Jim, I love you; will you marry me and live with me in the country and take my name?

Broxopp: I will. (*He kisses her, puts her back in*

the sofa and goes to the telephone. It is good-bye now to the beans.) Central 99199 . . . Hullo, is Mr. Morris in? Broxopp speaking . . . *Broxopp* speaking . . . Good heavens, haven't you ever heard the name of Broxopp before? For the last time—(*He looks up at Nancy.*) for the last time, Nancy—(*Down the telephone very firmly.*) Broxopp speaking!

CURTAIN.

ACT III

Scene: The big hall in the country place which Mr. Chillingham (née Broxopp) has bought. Through the open front doors can be seen a hint of the drive and the park beyond. It was Jack who chose it, and he has done the Great Broxopp rather well; there was no such view from that third floor in Bloomsbury.

It is about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Hidden away in a big armchair sits Nora Field, deep in a book. She is about twenty, wears a very short tweed skirt and very serviceable country shoes, has very decided opinions, and no hesitation at all about expressing them. Sir Roger Tenterden comes in, and begins to look about for a paper, but only finds Norah.

Tenterden: Hullo, Norah, didn't see you. Have you seen the *Financial Times* anywhere?

Norah: (*Without looking up.*) No. *Is* it anywhere?

Tenterden: I had it in here before lunch. Perhaps Benham has taken it away. (*He rings the bell.*) Where's everybody?

Norah: Jack and Iris are playing billiards. Ronnie's watching them and trying to pretend that he doesn't want to play himself. Mr. Chillingham is still out, I think. Fishing.

Tenterden: Fish ought to be rising today.

Norah: Yes.

Tenterden: And so you're all alone, eh?

Norah: (*With a meaning that escapes Sir Roger.*) I never mind being alone.

(*Enter Benham.*)

Benham: Yes, sir?

Tenterden: Ah, Benham, have you seen the *Financial Times* anywhere?

Benham: Not since it arrived this morning, sir.

Tenterden: I thought you might have taken it away. It was here before lunch.

Benham: I take in the *Financial News* myself, sir. If you would care to see it——

Tenterden: Thanks. You might bring it along to the morning room. And just have a look in the library to see if I left the *Times* there.

Benham: Yes, sir.

Tenterden: And bring me a whiskey and soda along to the morning room, too. I shan't want any tea.

Benham: Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

(*Exit Benham.*)

Tenterden: I didn't know Benham watched the markets.

Norah: I suppose he's wondering what to do with my ten shillings when I go.

Tenterden: (*Hospitably.*) Oh, you're not going yet, I hope.

Norah: No, not just yet.

Tenterden: Well, I must get back to my work. There's some funny things happening in the City just now, and one wants to be pretty wide awake.

Norah: I suppose so.

(*As Tenterden goes out, Ronny Derwent comes in.*)

Tenterden: Hullo, Ronny. I suppose *you* haven't taken the *Financial Times?*

Ronny: Good Lord, no. What's the good of it to *me?* I expect Mr. Chillingham had it round his sandwiches.

Tenterden: (*With a laugh.*) I hope not.

(*Tenterden goes out.*

Ronny is also twenty, but younger than Norah, and with no views on life other than that one's hair ought to be kept well down. Without seeing Norah, he rings the bell and lights a cigarette while waiting for Benham to come in.

Enter Benham.)

Ronny: Oh, I want a whiskey and soda, please, Benham.

Benham: Yes, sir.

Norah: (*From her chair.*) You don't really want one, Ronny.

Ronny: Good Lord! I didn't know you were there.

Norah: Mr. Derwent won't have a whiskey and soda, Benham; you can get him a glass of water if he's thirsty.

Ronny: Look here, Norah—(*She looks at him and he ends up weakly.*) Oh, very well.

Benham: Will you have the glass of water, sir?

Ronny: (*Sulkily.*) No, thanks.

Benham: Thank you, sir.

(*Benham goes out.*)

Ronny: I didn't know you were here. All the same, I don't know why I shouldn't have a drink if I want one.

Norah: I can't stand the way you children are

always wanting to drink. You've done nothing to make you thirsty.

Ronny: If you knew a bit more, you'd know that it's doing nothing that makes you thirsty. Talk to me and I'll struggle on without it. What are you reading?

Norah: Nobody you've ever heard of. A man called Meredith.

Ronny: Oh! Any good?

Norah: (*Looking at him with a smile.*) In his way. A different way from the *Winning Post,* you know.

Ronny: (*Wanting to be fair.*) Oh well, there's no accounting for tastes. Now, what do you think I found old man Chillingham reading last night?

Norah: (*Returning to her book.*) Don't know.

Ronny: Broxoppiana. Ever heard of it?

Norah: I've seen it on the book stalls.

Ronny: Broxoppiana. That's the name of the heroine, I suppose. And no better than she should be, if you ask *me,* because when the old man Chillingham saw I was looking he slipped the book into his pocket and pretended to be very busy over another one.

Norah: And I suppose you looked over his shoulder and found out what that one was, too?

Ronny: Well, if you want to know, I didn't. I knew what it was without looking over his shoulder. It was the *Science of Dry Fly Fishing.* Old man Chillingham trying to be a sportsman in his old age.

Norah: (*Shutting her book.*) I think you had better have that whiskey and soda, Ronny. At any rate it will prevent you trying to discuss your host with another of his guests.

Ronny: Rot, old girl. Jack's my host.

Norah: This is not Jack's house.

Ronny: Then why did Iris write to me as if it was? "Dear Ronny, do come and spend a few days with us, yours sincerely, Iris Chillingham." How's that, eh?

Norah: (*Patiently.*) It is Mr. Chillingham's house, but Mrs. Chillingham has been away for a few weeks. So Iris is playing hostess. I happened to mention that I had a disreputable little boy cousin called Ronald Derwent, and she very kindly——

Ronny: Not so much of it, Norah. I knew Iris before you did, and I knew Jack as soon as you did. And if it's old man Chillingham's house, all I can say is that old man Chillingham has got a very pretty taste in claret.

Norah: Really, Ronny, to hear you talk about claret anybody would think that you were grown up. Whereas we all know what you do with your threepence a week every Saturday. Peardrops, my lad, peardrops.

Ronny: (*Grimly.*) Very well, Norah, now you've done for yourself.

(*He seizes a cushion and advances upon her. She jumps out of the chair and runs to the other side of the hall, picking up a cushion on the way.*)

Norah: You'll get your hair ruffled if you aren't careful.

Ronny: You'll be lucky if you have any hair left by the time I've finished with you. (*He hurls a cushion at her.*)

Norah: Oh, rotten shot.

(*He goes to the sofa to get more cushions and dodges behind it as she flings hers at him. She rushes to the sofa and bangs at his head as it appears cautiously over the back. She*

runs back again just as Benham is crossing the hall with Sir Roger's whiskey and papers.)

Ronny: (*Who is about to throw a cushion.*) All right, Benham. You go on.

Benham: (*Politely.*) After you, sir.

(*The cushion whizzes past Benham's head at Norah.*)

Thank you, sir. (*He goes on to the morning room.*)

(*Norah rushes at Ronny and belabours him with the cushion. Ronny breaks away from her and runs out of the hall, Norah in pursuit, knocking over a chair or two on his way.*

Benham comes back again. As he crosses by the window, Broxopp is seen approaching from the outside. Benham goes to the front door and opens it for Broxopp.

Broxopp is now the complete country gentleman with fishing outfit. But he looks unhappy in his new clothes and is not the Broxopp he was.)

Broxopp: Ah, Benham.

Benham: (*Taking his things.*) Any sport, sir?

Broxopp: No . . . That is to say, *I* didn't have any. I can't speak for the fish.

Benham: I've heard gentlemen say that it can be a very attractive recreation even when (*he looks into the obviously empty basket*)—as in this case, sir.

Broxopp: To a man who really enjoys fishing—as I am told I do—no doubt that is so.

Benham: Yes, you're quite an enthusiast, sir.

Broxopp: So they assure me, Benham. Golf is another pastime to which—I understand—I am devoted. (*He looks in astonishment at the disordered hall, with*

its overturned chairs and scattered cushions.) Has anything been happening?

Benham: (*As he begins to restore the place to order.*) Nothing at all out of the way, sir.

Broxopp: (*Surprised.*) Oh!

Benham: Quite a feature of the best country-house life, sir, as you might say. The younger members of the party are often extremely partial to it. In this case, sir, Mr. Derwent and Miss Field were letting off their high spirits with a few cushions. It brought back the old castle days very pleasurably, sir.

Broxopp: Yes . . . Yes . . . They come back, the old days, don't they, Benham?

Benham: They do indeed, sir.

Broxopp: (*With a sigh.*) Yes. Mrs. Chillingham has not arrived yet, I suppose?

Benham: No, sir. Is she expected back this afternoon?

Broxopp: Of course she is. The 4.10. (*Looking at his watch.*) I suppose the train was late. Didn't Mr. Jack tell you about sending in the car?

Benham: I have not had any instructions myself, sir, but no doubt he informed the chauffeur. He was down at the stables after lunch with Mr. Derwent.

Broxopp: Ah, yes . . . Well, I'll go and wash. (*He moves off.*)

Benham: Thank you, sir.

(*Benham goes off.*

Broxopp is still in the hall, putting a cushion or two straight, when——

Ronny comes back, his hair rather rumpled.)

Ronny: Hullo! Any luck?

Broxopp: (*Wishing to be fair to the sport.*) Compared with yesterday—yes.

Ronny: What happened yesterday?

Broxopp: I fell in.

Ronny: (*Tittering.*) Bad luck. I'm not frightfully keen on fishing myself—I prefer golf. We're having a foursome after tea; I expect you'd rather practice by yourself, wouldn't you?

Broxopp: Thank you, I shall not be playing golf after tea today.

Ronny: I thought you were so frightfully keen. Jack said so.

Broxopp: Ah, well, Jack would know. But, you see, Mrs. Chillingham will be here directly——

Ronny: (*Surprised.*) Oh, is she coming back?

Broxopp: (*Nodding.*) Yes. She has been away three weeks now, staying in London with her sister. She'll be glad to get back. She is very fond of the country, you know. And this house.

Ronny: (*Kindly.*) Well, it isn't half a bad place, really. I don't know what the shooting's like.

Broxopp: Very good, Jack's friends tell me . . . Well, I must go and wash, if you will excuse me, Mr. Derwent.

Ronny: (*With a nod.*) Righto.

(*Broxopp goes out.*
Ronny lights a cigarette and goes across to the billiard-room door and opens it.)

Good Lord, haven't you finished yet?

Jack: (*From inside.*) This very minute as ever is.

(*Iris and Jack come out together.*)

Iris: Mrs. Chillingham junior ran out a winner

with an unfinished break of two . . . My dear Ronny, what *have* you been doing to your hair?

Ronny: (*Looking at himself in the glass—horrified.*) Good Lord, I oughtn't to be seen like this. (*He hurries out.*)

Jack: I suppose I was as young as Ronny once, but it must have been a long time ago. He makes me feel an old, old man.

Iris: (*Smiling at him.*) You don't look it, you know.

Jack: That's because I'm such a good actor. (*He goes to the bell and rings it.*) Shall we have tea in here?

Iris: If you like.

Jack: I suppose Dad isn't back yet . . . (*suddenly in dismay.*) Oh, Lord!

Iris: What is it, darling? Have you been bad?

Jack: I'm a blessed idiot.

Benham: (*Coming in.*) Yes, sir?

Jack: Benham, is anyone meeting the 4.10?

Benham: I have given no instructions in the matter myself, sir.

Iris: Jack, do you mean to say that nobody is meeting Nancy?

Jack: Kick me if you like, darling. It's my fault entirely. (*Looking at his watch.*) Send the car at once, Benham. It will probably be too late, but it can bring the luggage along.

Benham: Yes, sir.

Jack: (*To Iris.*) I'm afraid she'll walk through the woods, you know. (*To Benham.*) We'll have tea in here.

Benham: Yes, sir.

(*Exit Benham.*)

Iris: Jack, you *have* been bad.

Jack: I know. I told Dad this morning to leave it all to me. That's what comes of getting so old—your memory goes.

Iris: I do wish this hadn't happened.

Jack: After all, darling, it's only a mile by the short way and it's a jolly afternoon. There won't be anything about it in the papers.

Iris: Nancy will think that when she goes away I just take possession of her house and ask my own friends down, and don't even trouble to send a car to meet her at the station.

Jack: Anyone who knows Mother knows that she never thinks things like that.

Iris: I know. That seems to make it worse. (*She sits on the arm of his chair.*) Jack, don't you think it's time we had a house of our own? This has been very jolly here for a few months but—you *do* want to get started on your work, don't you?

Jack: Of course I do, sweetheart. Only we can't begin till we get the studio, can we?

Iris: London's full of studios, lazy one.

Jack: Yes, but you don't realise how important it is to an artist to get the exact surroundings. And now that we've found *the* studio in *all* London, and the man who's in it happens to be leaving in six months, it's absurd to go looking about for another. It's simply a question of waiting.

Iris: Six months?

Jack: Well, if we're lucky, he may die before. But we can't count on it.

Iris: (*Unconvinced.*) Oh, well . . . Well, I'm glad Nancy is coming back today.

Jack: After all, darling, it was more or less up to us to give Dad and Mother a start with their new house. They've lived in London so long that—well—I mean, naturally they wanted a bit of a start.

Iris: When Nancy is here, she looks as if she had lived in this sort of house all her life. She's just part of it.

Jack: (*Digesting this new idea.*) Do you know, that's quite true, Iris. I'd never really thought about it, but—yes, she does go with it somehow.

Iris: She loves it. She's awfully happy here.

Jack: Of course she is. So's Dad.

Iris: (*Looking at him with a smile.*) Do you think so?

Jack: (*Confidently.*) Oh, rather! Why, my dear girl, just look at the difference between a place like this and that awful office and factory in London. And look at his life now. Why, he never had a moment to himself before, and now he can do what he likes all day . . . Money! It's a great thing to have money. Reflection by John James Chillingham.

Iris: You can't get money without work.

Jack: Yes, but when you've got the money, why go on working?

Iris: We haven't even begun yet.

Jack: (*Lazily.*) You should read your Bible more. Moses or somebody said that no husband ought to do any work for a year after he's married. I quite agree with him. (*Playing with her hair.*) Did I ever tell you that I much prefer your hair to the stuff you see hanging in shop windows in Bond Street?

Iris: (*Softly.*) Do you?

Jack: It comes down, doesn't it?

Iris: Yes, when you take the pins out.

Jack:. Wonderful hair . . . Did I ever tell you that I like your eyes much better than the ones you see lying about in fishmongers' shops next to the ice?

Iris: (*Smiling.*) Do you?

Jack: They've got so much more expression . . . Did I ever tell you—hullo, here's tea.

(*Benham comes in.*)

Has the car gone, Benham?

Benham: Yes, sir.

Jack: Good. Let's hope the train's late.

Benham: (*Arranging the tea.*) I'm afraid it is not very likely, sir, I remember his Grace once commenting on the curious fact that, whenever one particularly wished a train to be late, it was invariably punctual.

Jack: His Grace seems to have been a highly original thinker.

Benham: Yes, sir, he was very well tolerated in the family.

Jack: Well, this must seem rather a holiday for you after the intellectual life at the castle. You must make the most of it, Benham.

Benham: Thank you, sir.

Iris: Is Mr. Chillingham back yet?

Benham: Yes, madam. He will be down directly. Sir Roger is engaged in the morning-room, Madam, with the financial papers, and will not require tea.

Iris: Thank you.

Benham: Thank you, madam.

(*Exit Benham.*)

Iris: I wonder what Father's up to now?

Jack: (*Carelessly.*) Losing Dad's money for him, I expect.

Iris: (*Seriously.*) Jack, you don't really mean that?

Jack: (*Laughing.*) Of course not, darling.

Iris: Father has such a way of losing other people's money with an air of conferring a favour upon them that it's very difficult to know what *is* happening sometimes. But still, I suppose he does know all about stocks and shares and things.

Jack: (*Lazily.*) He thinks he does, anyway. Well, I'm glad *I* don't. What's the matter with giving me some tea? We needn't wait for Dad. (*To Norah and Ronny as they come in.*) Come along. you're just in time . . . . Ah, now you look quite nice again, Ronny.

(*They all sit around the tea-things.*)

Iris: What had you been doing to him, Norah?

Norah: I told him he wasn't grown-up yet, and he tried to prove he was by throwing cushions at me.

Jack: That's a nasty one, Ronny. You'll have to write to your solicitors about that.

Ronny: (*Taking a piece of bread and butter.*) Now, look here, I don't want any more of it, Norah. I'm older than you, anyway. And Jack and Iris aren't exactly bald yet . . . What about that foursome after tea?

Jack: Iris and I are ready. (*To Iris.*) We'll put it across them this time, won't we?

Iris: (*Doubtfully.*) Well, I'm not quite sure if I——

Ronny: If you're thinking about Mr. Chillingham, he doesn't want to play. I asked him.

Iris: Oh, well, then, that's all right. He wants to wait for Nancy, I expect. Bless them.

Norah: I'm not at all sure that I approve of this old-fashioned sentiment about married life.

Jack: I say, this is rather alarming. (*Anxiously.*) You don't mind Iris and me being in love with each other?

Norah: In the first year of marriage, no, as long as it's not obtrusive.

Iris: (*Turning away.*) Jack, turn the other way at once.

(*Jack turns his back to Iris.*)

Norah: But women will never be properly free——

Ronny: (*Offering plate.*) Oh, Lord, have a bun.

Norah: (*Taking one.*) —until it is recognised that marriage——

(*Broxopp comes in.*)

Jack: Hallo, Dad, what luck?

Broxopp: (*Sitting in an uncomfortable chair, a little way from the table.*) Ah, tea.

Jack: Fish rising?

Broxopp: They may have risen, Jack, but if so they went back again. (*Looking at his watch.*) The train's very late. She ought to have been here by now.

Iris: There was some mistake about the car, dear. She will be here directly. (*She gives Broxopp his tea.*)

Broxopp: Thank you, thank you.

Norah: I was just saying, Mr. Chillingham, that women will never be properly free until it is recognised that marriage is only an intellectual partnership in which both the contracting parties have equal rights. Of course, I can hardly expect you to agree with me.

Broxopp: (*Looking blankly at her.*) I'm afraid I——

Ronny: Agree with you? I should think not indeed. If you knew a little more about the world, Norah——

Norah: My dear Ronny, the only world that *you* know is bounded on the north by Newmarket, on the south by the Savoy, on the east by the Empire, and on the west by the *Winning Post.*

Iris: You'll have to write to your solicitors *again,* Ronny.

Jack: I say, Norah, you mustn't say things like that without warning. Must she, Dad? Bread and butter? (*He offers the plate to Broxopp who takes a piece.*)

Broxopp: (*Bewildered.*) I'm afraid I hardly—— Thank you.

Iris: Was that original, Norah?

Norah: (*Calmly.*) Perfectly. Why not? I suppose Jack thinks that all the clever things must be said by men. I don't know what you feel about it, Mr. Chillingham——

Broxopp: I—er——

Jack: Then all I can say is that you must have bribed Ronny to lead up to it.

Iris: They've been rehearsing all the afternoon, I expect. Norah's cue was "world." (*To Jack.*) Shall we let them do it again?

Jack: Come on, Ronny. "If you knew a little more about the world, Norah——"

Iris: "My dear Ronny, the only world that *you* know——"

Jack: They could go on at the Palladium as "Ronald and Norah." Ronald leaning over the piano in white gloves.

Iris: Norah in a smile and shoulder straps looking at him over the music.

Norah: (*To Broxopp.*) This, Mr. Chillingham, is the marriage of intellect on an equal basis, which I was advocating just now.

Broxopp: You—er—were advo——?

Jack: Ronny, it's *your* turn to say something brilliant.

Ronny: No, thanks, I'll leave that to Norah's husband. When they are living in intellectual companionship together, they can fire off epigrams at each other all day long. What a life! Don't you agree with me, Mr. Chillingham? Have another bun, won't you? (*He takes one himself.*)

Broxopp: Miss Field was talking about the marriage of intellects. I remember—(*To Ronny with the bun plate.*) No, thank you.

Norah: Don't eat too many, Ronny. We've got to beat them afterwards, you know. You're not playing, Mr. Chillingham?

Broxopp: No, I think I——

Jack: Beat us, indeed. I should like to see you do it.

Ronny: Well, you will, Jack, old boy. What shall we give them this time, Norah? A third? I should think a third; wouldn't you, Mr. Chillingham?

Broxopp: I'm afraid I don't——

Norah: What would you like, Iris, or would you rather play level for once?

Iris: (*To Jack.*) Aren't they delightful? They've been rehearsing this, too, I expect.

Jack: (*Handing his cup.*) Stop being funny, and let me finish my tea.

Iris: (*To Broxopp.*) You'll want to wait for Nancy, won't you, dear?

Ronny: Do play if you'd like to, you know. Of course, it will dish the foursome rather, but——

Broxopp: Thank you, Mr. Derwent, but I shall be waiting for Mrs. Chillingham.

Norah: I was saying just now, Mr. Chillingham, that I don't altogether approve of married people——

Jack: Help! She's leading up to her epigram again.

Broxopp: Yes, Miss Field?

Ronny: I say, don't encourage her, we've had it all once. (*He takes a bun.*)

Norah: (*Taking it away from him.*) No more, Ronny, thank you. Remember we've got to beat them.

Ronny: (*Getting up.*) Right you are, old girl. (*To Iris.*) Are you ready?

Iris: I think so, aren't we, Jack? (*To Broxopp.*) Will you have some more tea, dear?

Broxopp: Not now, thank you, Iris. I'll wait for Nancy.

Jack: (*Finishing his tea.*) I say, what's the hurry? I've only just begun.

Ronny: Rot. Come on.

Iris: (*Getting up.*) I'll have half-a-crown on it, Norah.

Norah: Done.

Ronny: You too, Jack?

Jack: Rather!

Ronny: Good man. What about Mr. Chillingham? Care to bet against us? I'll give you five to four as you're a friend.

Broxopp: No, I think not, thank you, Mr. Derwent.

Ronny: Perhaps you're wise. You wouldn't have a chance. Come along.

Iris: Benham will make some fresh tea, dear. Give Nancy a special kiss from me.

Broxopp: Thank you, Iris, I will

Norah: (*At the door.*) The whole question of kissing seems to me——

Ronny: Oh, come off it. (*He drags her away.*)

Jack: Cheer oh, Dad! You and mother might come along and watch us if you've nothing better to do. (*To Ronny in front.*) All right, we're coming.

(*Jack and Iris go out.*
Left alone Broxopp rings the bell and then sits down in rather a bewildered way.
Benham comes in.)

Broxopp: We shall want some fresh tea for Mrs. Chillingham when she comes in.

Benham: Yes, sir. I think I saw her just coming through the rose garden, sir.

Broxopp: (*Jumping up and going to the door.*) Coming through the—you don't mean to say that—Why, Nancy! (*He brings her in.*) Benham, get that fresh tea at once!

Benham: (*Going to tea table.*) Yes, sir.

Nancy: How are you, Benham? Isn't it nice to be back? Yes, I should like some tea, please. And you had better send the car for my luggage.

Broxopp: Your luggage? You don't mean——

Benham: The car has gone, madam.

Nancy: Ah, that's right.

(*Benham goes out.*)

Broxopp: (*Horrified.*) Nancy, you weren't *met?*

Nancy: No, darling, I suppose there was some mistake.

Broxopp: (*Throwing up his hands in despair.*) I thought I could leave that much to Jack. Well, let's have a look at you. (*He holds her at arms' length.*) And they forgot all about you!

Nancy: Oh, but I enjoyed the walk, you know. The woods, Jim! You never saw anything like them just now.

Broxopp: Oh, well, nothing matters now you're here. (*He kisses her.*) Do you know Miss Norah Field, Nancy?

Nancy: I expect she was at the wedding, wasn't she? Iris told me she wanted to ask her here. Is she nice?

Broxopp: (*Kissing her again.*) She doesn't approve of kissing.

Nancy: (*Sitting down at the tea table.*) Perhaps she's never tried.

Enter Benham.

Tea, how nice. You must have it with me, Jim.

Broxopp: (*Firmly.*) I'm going to.

Benham: Is there anything more, Madam?

Nancy: No, thank you. Are you quite well, Benham?

Benham: Yes, thank you, madam. Pretty well, considering.

Nancy: That's right.

(*Benham goes out.*

As soon as they are alone, Nancy blows Broxopp a kiss and then pours out the tea.)

Nancy: Well, how has everybody been getting on without me?

Broxopp: (*Tapping his chest.*) Me?

Nancy: You, and everybody—Is Sir Roger still here?

Broxopp: Oh, yes.

Nancy: Well, all of you. And the garden, and the puppies. Oh, I asked you to tell me and you never did. Has the moorhen had any babies yet?

Broxopp: (*Bewildered.*) Moorhen?

Nancy: The one on the pond. Don't say that the tulips are over. I couldn't bear it. Oh, Jim, the bluebells in the wood! Will you come with me and see the puppies after tea?

Broxopp: Of course I will . . . Bread and butter, or what will you have? (*He offers her a plate.*)

Nancy: No, I won't have anything to eat. (*Looking round the hall.*) Oh, it is lovely to be back. Have you been very lonely without me?

Broxopp: Very.

Nancy: The one letter I had from Jack seemed to say that you were all enjoying yourselves very much. What have you been doing? You didn't tell me much about yourself.

Broxopp: Oh, fishing, golf—all the things that a country gentleman does. Talking to Jack and his friends. (*Grimly.*) They are wonderful talkers.

Nancy: (*Proudly.*) So are you, Jim.

Broxopp: (*Shaking his head.*) The world is getting too quick for me. When I talk, I like to finish what I have to say. I never seem to have a chance now . . . But never mind about *me*. Tell me about yourself. Did you have a comfortable journey?

Nancy: It's always comfortable first class.

Broxopp: (*Eagerly.*) And how's old London looking?

Nancy: (*Smiling.*) Just the same.

Broxopp: (*Casually.*) You didn't happen to be Fenchurch Street way at all any time?

Nancy: Oh, no. I don't suppose anybody would have known me.

Broxopp: (*Eagerly.*) Old Carter would—I suppose he's still there. They wouldn't get rid of Carter. He always used to remember how you came up the first day we opened the office, and I'd had lunch sent in—do you remember?—and a bottle of champagne. The first champagne you'd ever had—do you remember, Nancy?—and how frightened you were when the cork came out.

Nancy: (*Gently.*) I remember, Jim.

Broxopp: I thought perhaps you might just have passed by outside—on your way somewhere. (*Wistfully.*) I suppose you still see the same—the same advertisements everywhere? Have we—have they got any new ones.

Nancy: I didn't notice any.

Broxopp: (*Nodding his head.*) They can't do better than the old ones. (*After a pause.*) Of course, there *are* new ideas (*He gets up and walks about*)—there was one I was thinking of this morning when I was out—nothing to do with me now—I just happened to think of it. (*He is carried away by it as he goes on.*) I don't know if you've ever seen a man drawing on a film—you see a few lines first which mean nothing, and then gradually it begins to take shape. Well, you'd have your posters like that—altering every week. A large poster with just a few meaningless lines on it. Everybody would wonder what it

meant. They'd all talk about it. Next week a few more lines added. It still means nothing, but one sees just a vague hint of a picture coming. Everybody still talking about it. Next week a curve here and there, a bit of shading somewhere. People get more and more interested. What is coming? And so it goes on. And then in the last week, the lines all join together, some of them become writing, you see "BROXOPPS——" (*He breaks off, pulls himself together, and says casually.*) The idea just came to me this morning when I was out. Of course, it's nothing to do with me now. (*He gives a little laugh and sits down again.*)

Nancy: (*Who has been watching him intently.*) It's a wonderful idea.

Broxopp: (*Pleased.*) Not bad, is it? (*With an effort.*) However, that's nothing to do with it, now.

Nancy: (*Slowly to herself.*) I think perhaps it has.

Broxopp: (*Trying to get away from his thoughts.*) And how did you leave Emily?

Nancy: (*Thinking of other things.*) Oh, she was very well when I left. Better than I've seen her lately.

Broxopp: Sorry to let you go, I expect.

Nancy: She was very glad when I came. She'd had rather a fright about her money.

Broxopp: Oh, what was that?

Nancy: I don't know that I quite understood it all, but there was some Building Society—the Excelsior, I think it was called—a very good investment, all the advertisements said—and she sold all her shares in order to put it into this, and then a man she met—somebody who really *does* know—told her it was——

Broxopp: Fraudulent?

Nancy: Well, that she'd lose all her money. And so she had to buy back all the shares she had sold, and pay much more for them. I don't know why.

Broxopp: Price gone up, I suppose.

Nancy: Oh, would that be it? Well, it wasn't very nice for her. But, of course, she's thankful when she thinks of what might have happened.

Broxopp: Funny how everybody thinks that he can make money in the City. People say to me, "You're a business man." I say, "I'm not a business man. I'm an artist. I have large ideas. But I know my limitations. I *employ* business men. That's why I've built up such a good business." In the same way I employ Sir Roger. He knows; I don't. But Sir Roger couldn't have made Broxopp.

Nancy: I've been thinking about Sir Roger. *Does* he know?

Broxopp: (*A little alarmed.*) What do you mean, Nancy?

Nancy: Of course, he's quite honest, but I think sometimes we've been rather foolish in letting him have so much to say in the investing of your money. I suppose you keep an eye on things for yourself?

Broxopp: (*Hastily.*) Yes, yes, of course I do . . . He is a little difficult to—er—I mean he *has* rather a way with him, which— But I must certainly go into things with him. You're quite right, Nancy. I'm not going to let Sir Roger or anybody else play ducks and drakes with the money which *I* earned. (*He looks round the hall, and then says, proudly.*) And I started at six shillings a week! (*Bitterly.*) Let Mr. Ronny Derwent do *that* if he can.

Nancy: (*Going to him.*) I'm sure Mr. Ronny Der-

went couldn't. (*Kissing him.*) Does *he* object to kissing, too?

(*They are interrupted by the arrival of Sir Roger, much to Broxopp's confusion.*)

Tenterden: Ah, Mrs. Chillingham, so you're back! Welcome home!

Nancy: How do you do, Sir Roger?

Tenterden: A pleasant visit, I hope?

Nancy: Very, thank you. But I'm glad to be home again.

Tenterden: With so beautiful a house, who would not?

Broxopp: Oh, we're very comfortable here, aren't we, Nancy?

Nancy: (*Looking round it, and speaking from the heart.*) I love it! . . . . Have you had tea, Sir Roger?

Tenterden: Yes, yes, thank you, all I want. Been busy all day, Mrs. Chillingham. A great nuisance, business, on a day like this. And when there is so much that is attractive all around one. And there's your lucky husband—no cares at all—goes off fishing—By the way, Chillingham, what luck?

Broxopp: (*Carelessly.*) Oh, about the usual . . . Er—I was—er—wanting to talk to you, Sir Roger, about—er——

Tenterden: My dear friend, by all means. In fact, I was going to ask you to spare me a few moments. I rather want your advice.

Nancy: (*Preparing to go.*) Well, I must take off my things. And you can talk business together. I

expect you will want to be alone. But don't keep him too long, Sir Roger, because I want him.

(*Tenterden is moving politely to the door but Broxopp does not move.*)

Broxopp: (*With a smile.*) You're my business partner, Nancy, I've no secrets from you. If you don't mind, Sir Roger? If it's just a question of a lucky investment you have put me into—well, my wife shares my good fortune to-day, just as she shared my ill-fortune in the days gone by.

Tenterden: It is just as Mrs. Chillingham wishes.

Nancy: You can always tell me afterwards, Jim.

Broxopp: Nonsense, we may want your help. (*To Tenterden.*) I remember once putting a little money into a mine which a friend had spoken well of. My wife was very much against it—do you remember, Nancy? She said that it would be much safer in the bank. Well, she was quite right.

Nancy: (*Sitting down again.*) Of course, I was. (*With a smile of remembrance.*) But do you remember what fun we had watching the papers to see whether it went up or down?

Broxopp: Yes . . . it went down.

Tenterden: Ah, what mine was that?

Broxopp: Oh, I really forget now. Some Welsh gold-mine, I believe.

Tenterden: Yes, I think I could have given you a word of warning about Welsh gold-mines, Chillingham, if you had consulted me.

Broxopp: This was long before we had the pleasure of knowing you, Sir Roger.

Tenterden: Ah, a pity, a pity!

Nancy: (*With a pleasant smile.*) That's why we're so glad to have your help now. I should never have

trusted Jim with all the money he got from Broxopp's Beans.

Tenterden: (*Wincing at the hated word.*) All the money he—ah—retired with. Yes. Well, I hope, Chillingham, I really hope that we shall be able to do something for you before very long.

Broxopp: Well, I left it to you, Sir Roger. But naturally I—er—like to know how things are going on. How are those Oil Shares?

Tenterden: Oil! Oil! Ah, yes. Well, we have lost a little there. (*With a charming smile.*) You know how it is, Mrs. Chillingham. One loses a little here, and picks up a little more there . . . Yes, I have been disappointed over that oil. Very disappointed. However, we must take these things as they come.

Nancy: I always think that something safe, however little interest it pays, is—is safest.

Tenterden: Safer than losing it, my dear Mrs. Chillingham—all women will agree with you there—but not so pleasant as winning a little more. Your husband sold his business at an unfortunate time. Our hand was forced; we had to sell; we had to take the price they offered. Possibly, if we had had more time to look round, we should have done better, but there it was. Naturally, then, your husband felt that a little speculation before investing—well, I call it a speculation, but as I could tell him from my inside knowledge, it was almost a certainty. And had it come off, it would have given him enough for that safe investment, with small interest which you (*with a bow to Mrs. Chillingham*) very naturally desire.

Broxopp: (*Sharply.*) Had it come off, you say?

Tenterden: Exactly. As you know, my dear Chillingham, one loses a little more here and picks up a

little there. In the end one finds that one has picked up a good deal more than one has lost. If one knows the ropes, Mrs. Chillingham. That, if I may say so, is where I come in; and very much at your service.

Broxopp: (*Fiercely.*) How much of my money have you lost?

Tenterden: (*Gently.*) I think, Chillingham, that that is hardly the way to put it. I am not—(*With a bow*) an absconding solicitor.

Broxopp: (*Upset.*) I beg your pardon, Sir Roger. What I feel is that if it is a question of losing money by speculation, I can lose it quite easily by myself. I don't want any help. I understood that I could rely upon your knowledge——

Tenterden: (*Beautifully.*) My dear Chillingham, of course, of course. You are quite right. I will let you have a note of your investments this evening. Naturally you will wish to conduct your business yourself in the future, or to take other advice. (*With a smile to Nancy.*) I think your husband is quite right, Mrs. Chillingham. Business and friendship should not be mixed up. Although, of course, if one hears of a good thing, one does like putting one's—ah—best pals on to it. It's human nature, I suppose.

Nancy: Oh, but I'm sure Jim didn't mean to suggest——

Tenterden: (*Smiling.*) That I was a knave? No, hardly. But that I was a fool! Eh, Chillingham? Oh, I think so. I think so.

Broxopp: (*Very uncomfortably.*) Sir Roger—you see—of course I don't——

Tenterden: (*Holding up his hand.*) Please, please don't say any more. If anything, the apology should come from me. I have lost your money. (*To Nancy*

charmingly.) Yes, Mrs. Chillingham, a good deal of it. And a good deal of my own, too. Fortunately I see my way to getting my own back, with a little over. (*Laughing pleasantly.*) But of course I mustn't tell your husband how. Eh, Chillingham? He has washed his hands of me. Quite right, too. I should never forgive myself if I mentioned now the little investment which is going to put me on my legs, because he might be tempted to come into it, too, and—(*With a shrug.*) After all, you can never be certain. We have had one disappointment over the Oil; we might have another over—well, shall we say cocoanuts? But somehow (*Smiling to himself.*) I don't think that we shall . . . But, of course, one can't guarantee it. (*Getting up.*) Well, Mrs. Chillingham, then that's settled. (*He gives her a pleasant smile.*) Chillingham, perhaps you could spare me half an hour this evening, and then we can go into these matters. Between ourselves, Mrs. Chillingham, I shall be glad to be relieved of the responsibility. (*Looking through the window.*) Beautiful weather we're having just now. The young people out enjoying themselves, I suppose. Golf, what? No cares, no responsibilities—lucky young people! Well, then, this evening, Chillingham.

(*Tenterden gives them a pleasant nod and goes out.*)

Broxopp: (*Unhappy.*) Nancy, I wasn't rude, was I?

Nancy: (*Her thoughts elsewhere.*) No, dear, no.

Broxopp: You don't think Jack will think I was—ungrateful and—and ill-mannered?

Nancy: No, dear, you—After all, as you said, why should Sir Roger lose the money which you have worked so hard for?

Broxopp: Exactly. And I didn't accuse him of anything. I only said——

Nancy: (*Watching him carefully.*) The money on which you were going to retire so happily.

Broxopp: Yes, exactly.

Nancy: No more anxieties, no more hard work. Just a happy quiet life, all the day to yourself, doing whatever you liked.

Broxopp: (*Less heartily.*) Er—yes. Yes.

Nancy: Fishing——

Broxopp: (*Doing his best.*) Yes.

Nancy: Golf——

Broxopp: (*Looking at her and looking away again.*) Yes.

Nancy: Talking to Jack's friends——(*Broxopp doesn't exactly say anything*) enjoying yourself from morning till night.

Broxopp: (*Eagerly.*) And you, too, Nancy!

Nancy: Oh yes, I enjoy it. (*With a sigh.*) I love it.

Broxopp: (*Trying to be enthusiastic.*) Of course its a fine place. A very fine place.

Nancy: Yes . . . All the same, dear, I think perhaps you *were* a little—not rude exactly—abrupt with Sir Roger.

Broxopp: (*Anxiously.*) Do you think so?

Nancy: (*Nodding.*) 'M.

Broxopp: Ought I to go and—er—just say something——

Nancy: I think you'd better leave it to me, dear. (*She gives him her purse-bag.*) Just put this up in my room for me, and wait for me in the rose-garden.

Broxopp: You're going to—say something to him? (*She nods.*) You're quite right, Nancy. Perhaps I *was* a little—I don't want him to think—Well, I'll wait for you in the rose-garden.

(*As Broxopp goes out he turns at the door, and Nancy blows a kiss to him.*

Left alone, she looks round her hall, sighs, and goes to the door and looks out at her garden, shakes her head at it, and comes back again. She is just going to the morning-room when —Sir Roger comes in.)

Tenterden: Ah, Mrs. Chillingham. I think I left the paper—Ah, there it is!

Nancy: I was just coming to see you, Sir Roger.

Tenterden: (*With a bow.*) Need I say that I am always at your service?

Nancy: (*Indicating a chair.*) Do sit down, won't you? (*She sits down herself.*)

Tenterden: (*Sitting.*) Thank you.

Nancy: Sir Roger, has my husband lost much of his money?

Tenterden: My dear Mrs. Chillingham, five minutes ago I should not have used the word "lost" at all. It was just, if I may put it so, the opening skirmish in a campaign. One does not say that a campaign is lost because at the first few shots—(*He shrugs his shoulders.*)

Nancy: Yes, I understand.

Tenterden: However, now that I am no longer responsible for the campaign——

Nancy: (*Quietly.*) I don't want you to say that.

Tenterden: Well, I confess that I should be very sorry to say so, particularly just at this moment when I see my way to something really big. I received some

information yesterday—well, it is as I was telling you just now. Cocoanuts, I called it. (*With a smile.*) No, it is not cocoanuts, Mrs. Chillingham. Something better than cocoanuts. A Building Society. I have the option of a very large block of shares——

Nancy: (*With a start.*) A Building Society? Not the Excelsior?

Tenterden: Yes. Why, have you heard about it?

Nancy: (*Looking at him thoughtfully.*) A friend of mine was mentioning it.

Tenterden: Well, if he's wise, he'll go in. And if I were still advising Mr. Chillingham, I should say to him "Go in." Go right in—as a speculation, if you like—the price will go up and up—or better still, as an investment. There's your gilt-edged investment, Mrs. Chillingham. Not three per cent, though; ten. And safe. Safe as (*with a smile*) shall I say houses?

Nancy: (*To herself.*) I wonder. It's a chance.

Tenterden: It's more than a chance. It's a certainty. My experience of the City, my knowledge of these undertakings, tells me that it's a certainty.

Nancy: (*Absently.*) Yes, I didn't mean that sort of chance . . . (*She gets up.*) Sir Roger, I think I can persuade my husband. I agree with you that it's too good a chance to be missed. And (*She gives him a smile, but it is a secret joke of her own.*) I should like to say that I have absolute confidence in you. (*She gives him her hand.*)

Tenterden: (*Kissing it gracefully.*) My dear lady, I am sure that your husband will never regret it.

Nancy: (*To herself, with rather a wistful smile, as he goes to the door.*) Well, that's what I'm rather hoping.

(*She looks a little sadly round the home that she has come to love so much.*
Broxopp comes in.)

Broxopp: Oh, you're here? Have you——

Nancy: I've spoken to him.

Broxopp: Is it all right?

Nancy: (*Going to him and taking his arm.*) Everything is going to be quite all right, dear.

(*They go into the garden together.*)

ACT IV

Scene: Broxopp is back at No. 26. The room looks much the same as it did those many years ago, but it has been improved by one or two pieces of furniture saved from the wreck.
The Broxopps are out, and Sir Roger Tenterden is waiting for the return of one of them. He is getting impatient. He looks at his watch and decides that he can wait no longer. He picks up his hat and is on his way to the door, when—Nancy comes in with some parcels in a string bag.

Nancy: (*Taken by surprise.*) Oh, how you startled me . . . Why, it's Sir Roger!

Tenterden: I must apologise——

Nancy: (*Smiling.*) So must I. I've been shopping And it's the maid's afternoon out.

Tenterden: (*A little blankly.*) Oh—ah—yes. They told me down below to come up and—ah——

Nancy: That's right. I just went out to get some kidneys.

She holds up a parcel and Sir Roger shudders.
I haven't bought kidneys for I don't know how many years; it feels quite strange. Do come and sit down. How's Iris? We haven't seen her lately. (*She leads the way to the table and puts the bag down on it.*)

Tenterden: Well, it was really about Iris that I ventured to come and see you so informally, Mrs. Chillingham. I happened to have a business appointment just across the road, and—ah——

Nancy: How nice of you!

Tenterden: Is Iris quite well?

Nancy: Oh, I think so. Jack seems to be very busy. We have a note from him every now and then, saying that they will come and see us when his picture is finished.

Tenterden: Ah! So he's painting. Excellent.

Nancy: They've a studio in St. John's Wood. But surely Iris must have told you?

Tenterden: I assure you, Mrs. Chillingham, that Iris has not condescended to communicate with me since—ah——

Nancy: Since we lost all our money.

Tenterden: Since that very unfortunate Excelsior business. Upon my word, I don't know what the City is coming to nowadays. With so many rogues about, it is almost impossible for a gentleman to make an honest living. However, things have been looking up lately. (*Smiling to himself.*) Oh, yes, looking up—decidedly. But then I knew they would. I only wish, my dear Mrs. Chillingham, that your husband could have been participating in my good fortune.

Nancy: (*Smiling.*) Well, we had no money left, you see.

Tenterden: (*Holding up a hand.*) Don't think I am blaming your husband. Pray don't think that. I assure you, I quite understand. And so Jack is painting? Making quite a good living by it, what? You relieve my mind considerably, Mrs. Chillingham. I shall go away happy now. I shouldn't have liked to think that my daughter was uncomfortable. What a thing it is to be born with such a gift! Lucky Jack! And Mr. Chillingham, I trust, quite well?

Nancy: Very well indeed, thank you. He hasn't looked so well for a long time.

Tenterden: Excellent, excellent. And making his fortune again, I've no doubt. I'm delighted to hear it. Well, Mrs. Chillingham, I must be getting on. I am most relieved to hear your good news. Remember me to your husband, please, and tell him that if, at any time, he wants a good investment, I shall only be too delighted to be of any service. (*Holding up his hand.*) No, don't thank me. I should be only too glad to. It would be a privilege. (*He shakes her warmly by the hand.*) Good-bye, good-bye.

(*He goes out, magnificently.*

As soon as she has recovered, Nancy takes off her hat and goes to the table to work. Seeing the string bag there, she takes both it and the hat out of the room, and comes back again. Then she settles down at the table to it. She is drawing an advertisement for Broxopp, as we can see by the way she bites her pencil and frowns to herself.

A cheerful voice, singing a song without words, is heard outside, and The Great One Comes In. He is wearing the old sombrero—the Broxopp hat—and (a novelty this) a pale grey tail coat and trousers. He carries two or three parcels in his hand.)

Broxopp: Nancy!

Nancy: (*Jumping up.*) Jim!

Broxopp: My darling! Just wait a moment till I put down these parcels. (*He puts them down on the table.*) Now then! (*He holds out his arms and she comes to him. After he has kissed her, he says solemnly.*) I've thanked Heaven every day since we've been

here that I can kiss you now without being observed by butlers. Another one!

(*He kisses her again and then holds her at arms' length.*)

All right?

Nancy: Of course I am.

Broxopp: (*Taking off his hat.*) I met Sir Roger just outside.

Nancy: Did you speak to him?

Broxopp: I said "Hallo!" and he said "Ah, Chillingham, Chillingham!" Has he been here?

Nancy: Just to ask after Iris, and (*smiling*) to say how glad he was that you were making your fortune again.

Broxopp: Did you tell him that I was making my fortune again?

Nancy: He told himself. I didn't say anything.

Broxopp: Well, you might have, Nancy. Because it's true. I'm going to.

Nancy: I'm sure you are, dear . . . Say you don't feel bitter against Sir Roger.

Broxopp: Bitter? Nancy, I'll tell you a secret. I'm *glad* he has lost my money.

(*Nancy nods to herself.*)

There! There are not many people who would say that, but then I'm not like other people. I have my own way of looking at things . . . Well, and what have *you* been doing?

Nancy: Shopping. And—(*looking rather sadly at her drawing.*)—and Ajax.

Broxopp: Ajax?

Nancy: Ajax defying the lightning.

Broxopp: (*Pleased.*) Ah, that was a good idea, wasn't it, Nancy? (*Declaiming.*) "Ajax defied the lightning. Why? Because he knew that he was insured against fire with the West End Insurance Company." (*Going over to her work.*) Have you been doing that for me?

Nancy: Yes, darling, but I can't get Ajax properly. He doesn't look as though he's defying anything.

Broxopp: (*Looking at Ajax.*) No, he doesn't, does he? Yet what a touch you had with suspenders in the old days.

Nancy: (*Sadly.*) I think suspenders must be easier than Ajaxes, unless perhaps it's because I'm getting old.

Broxopp: (*Indignantly.*) Old? You get younger every day. (*Picking up one of his parcels.*) In fact, you're such a baby that I had to buy these for you this afternoon. (*He hands her a box of chocolates with a bow.*)

Nancy: Oh, Jim, darling, you shouldn't waste your money on me. You must remember what a little we have now.

Broxopp: The less money we have, the more reason for spending it so as to produce the greatest amount of happiness. It gave the shopman great pleasure to sell these chocolates to me, it gave me great pleasure to buy them for you, it's going to give you great pleasure to eat them. Was ever half-a-crown more nobly spent?

Nancy: Half-a-crown?

Broxopp: (*Airily.*) Two and sixpence.

Nancy: Of course, in a way, it's fun beginning all over again——

Broxopp: Fun! It's Life! Did you ever hear of a man called Stevenson? He invented the first steam

engine. He agrees with me about this. He said "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive." Of course, he was thinking of his railways. But it's true. Going there is better fun than getting there. We got there once, Nancy, and now we are going there again.

Nancy: But we're twenty-five years older.

Broxopp: And twenty-five years wiser, and twenty-five years more in love with each other. That makes a difference.

Nancy: Yes, but what I'm rather afraid of is that we've had—well, fifteen years of *spending* money, and —(*She opens the box and looks at it doubtfully.*)— Well, I may as well see what they're like. (*She nibbles one.*) They are lovely. (*She puts it in her mouth.*)

Broxopp: You needn't be afraid. We're going to have money to spend. But we'll have the fun of making it first. (*With an air.*) Madam, you see before you the Great Chillingham. (*A little hurt.*) You don't say anything.

(*She taps her mouth to indicate that she is too busy.*)

Ah, I see. But perhaps it is as well. The Great Chillingham is not yet before you. I spoke too soon. (*He begins to undo the other parcels.*)

Nancy: (*Now articulate.*) Yes, darling?

Broxopp: Wait! (*He opens the parcels—a Chillingham grey bowler hat and a Chillingham pink tie are disclosed.*) Permit me, Madam, to introduce to you the Chillingham hat and the Chillingham tie!

Nancy: (*Lovingly.*) My Broxopp baby!

Broxopp: (*A little hurt.*) This is not babyness, it's business. I called on the Aquavim people today—the Brain Tonic for Tired Workers. I announced that I was willing to undertake the entire management and re-

construction of their business for them. They declined. I then said that, temporarily and until greater opportunities offered, I might be induced to advertise their poison for them. They replied that they no longer wrote their own advertisements; they were written for them by eminent authors, actors, painters, soldiers and statesmen, in exchange for a few bottles and the publicity which it brought them. I said modestly that, if it came to that, I myself was at one time not unknown in the world of commerce. The manager looked at my card again and regretted that he could not seem to recall the name of Chillingham. That opened my eyes, Nancy, and I decided that all the world should know—(*Putting on the bowler hat and striking an attitude.*) The Great Chillingham! But you'll see it better directly, when I've got the tie on.

Nancy: (*Going to him.*) Say you don't regret Broxopp very much.

Broxopp: Does an artist regret selling a picture after he has painted it? I made the name of Broxopp and when I had made it, I sold it. Now I'm going to make the name of Chillingham. I can make any name —with you helping me, Nancy.

Nancy: Of course you can. (*Timidly.*) Have you decided what we shall make the name of Chillingham famous about?

Broxopp: That's the beauty of it. I got so deep into that groove of Beans for Babies that I thought of nothing else for twenty-five years. Now we have the whole world to choose from. Don't let us be in a hurry. (*Taking off his hat and regarding it.*) I think the new hat is striking, don't you? But keep the old one, Nancy? When the story of my life comes to be written, the author may wish to see it personally. Well,

I'll go and put the tie on . . . But I was forgetting. Who do you think I saw today?

Nancy: (*Eagerly.*) Not Jack?

Broxopp: Jack.

Nancy: But why didn't you tell me? How is he? How is he looking?

Broxopp: You'll see for yourself directly. He and Iris are coming round this afternoon.

Nancy: How nice. Then I suppose his picture is finished. How is Iris?

Broxopp: He didn't tell me anything, except that he was coming. We were both of us in a hurry. Well, I'll go and put on this tie. On this day The Great Chillingham was born.

(*Broxopp goes out.*
Nancy returns to Ajax, but she has hardly begun to do anything to it, when there is a gentle tap at the door.)

Nancy: Come in.

Iris: (*Her head round the door.*) May I come in?

Nancy: Oh, Iris! And I'm not dressed or anything.

Iris: Well, I'm not very grand myself. (*Kissing her.*) You look as young as ever, Nancy. Is Jack here?

Nancy: No. He's coming, isn't he?

Iris: He was going to meet me here. (*Looking round the room she says sadly*) Oh, Nancy!

Nancy: Why "Oh, Nancy?"

Iris: To see you in this room—after what you're accustomed to.

Nancy: (*Smiling.*) But I'm accustomed to this. This is where we lived before Jack was born.

Iris: I know. And now Jack and I have brought you back to it . . . Do you forgive me?

Nancy: I shan't if you talk so foolishly.

Iris: You'll never forgive Father, of course. Neither shall I. I told him so.

Nancy: Yes, I'm not sure that you ought to have . . . You see, it was just as much my doing as your father's.

Iris: (*Surprised*) Yours?

Nancy: (*Nodding.*) Yes. You see, Jim wasn't happy at the Manor House. I thought at first that he might manage to be, but he wasn't. He's the sort of man who must always be working. And so I thought that if we lost all our money and had to start work again, there was just a chance of his being happy again. So I—(*a little embarrassed.*) I'm afraid I encouraged your father rather.

Iris: I don't think Father wants much encouragement at losing other people's money.

Nancy: Well, I didn't stop him when I knew he was being silly, and I wouldn't let Jim stop him, and—and well, here we are, dear, and Jim is as happy as can be.

Iris: And is Nancy?

Nancy: (*A little sadly.*) Well, of course, I did love the Manor House, Iris. (*With a sudden smile.*) But this is fun, you know. It's like a second honeymoon.

Iris: Oh, Nancy! . . . And how *is* Daddy Broxopp?

Nancy: (*With a loving smile.*) Enjoying himself so much. Oh, we shall be all right. He'll get hold of some wonderful idea soon. (*Getting up.*) Come and take off your hat. You mustn't be a visitor.

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

There! That's Jack!

(*Enter Jack.*)

Jack: (*Announcing himself.*) The Return of the Prodigal.

Nancy: Oh, Jack, how nice to see you again, dear.

Jack: (*Kissing her.*) How *are* you, darling? You look remarkably blooming. (*Shaking hands with Iris.*) How do you do, Madam?

Iris: How do you do, sir?

Nancy: Iris is just coming into my room. We won't be long.

Jack: Right. Where's Dad?

Nancy: He'll be here in a moment.

Jack: Good man. (*He opens the door for them. To Iris.*) You haven't broken the bad news yet?

Iris: No.

Nancy: Jack! There's nothing——?

Iris: (*Smiling.*) It's all right, dear. It's only a little discovery we've made

Nancy: There are plenty of discoveries to be made when you are poor.

(*Nancy and Iris go out together.*
Jack wanders round the room and comes to the unfinished Ajax on the table.)

Jack: (*Catching sight of it.*) Good heavens, who's this? (*Looking at it carefully.*) It can't be anybody at the Club.

(*Enter Broxopp with a terrific air as the Great Chillingham. He pulls up at seeing only Jack.*)

Broxopp: Hallo, boy. So you've come.

Jack: Hallo, Dad.

Broxopp: Iris here?

Jack: Yes, she's in with mother.

Broxopp: How are you getting on? We haven't seen much of you lately.

Jack: Well, we've all been working so hard. (*Going up to him.*) You're looking extraordinary bright, Dad. (*He puts an arm affectionately round his father's shoulder and fingers the Chillingham tie.*) Who's your lady friend?

Broxopp: (*With dignity.*) Have you never heard of the Chillingham tie, boy?

Jack: Never. Is that it?

Broxopp: It is. (*Simply.*) It will be heard of one day.

Jack: I'm sure it will. I can almost hear it now. (*Patting him affectionately.*) Dear old Dad—I've been a rotten son to you, haven't I?

Broxopp: (*Considering it fairly.*) No, I won't say that, Jack. You were a very good son to me when you were a baby. You did a lot for the Broxopp business, and I used to like telling people in the City all the funny little things you said. Besides, you made your mother very happy. And then when you were growing up I used to enjoy talking about my boy at Eton and my boy at Oxford. One way and another I've got a good deal of happiness out of you.

Jack: And then, when I was grown up, you suddenly found that I was a selfish beast.

Broxopp: You can't expect Father and Son to see things the same way. One or the other has got to be selfish. It's generally the father.

Jack: Well, in this case it was the son. And I've made a pretty good hash of things, haven't I? To think that just because of me, you and Mother are living in this shabby little place when you might be——

Broxopp: (*In alarm.*) Don't say fishing!

Jack: Well, let's say living in comfort.

Broxopp: You may say I might have been living in comfort. That's where you're wrong. I might have been existing in comfort; I shouldn't have been living. You needn't reproach yourself at all. I gave up the business for you. Yes. But I hadn't been really happy there for some time. It was getting too easy. You see, I like fighting. So does your mother . . . She is a great help to me, Jack. Stick to your wife whatever happens, my boy. (*Sententiously.*) A good woman is like——

Jack: (*Wickedly.*) Is this from Broxoppiana or Chillinghamiana?

Broxopp: (*Plaintively.*) That's the worst of having a grown-up son; he lets you know when he finds you out. A wife never does . . . Well, and how's the picture? Finished?

Jack: Wait till Iris comes in. We've decided to tell you our sad story hand in hand. Besides, while we've got the chance, Dad, there's something I want you to tell *me.*

Broxopp: Well, what is it?

Jack: Well, then—as man to man—how are you getting on?

Broxopp: As man to man, Jack, I am really happy again.

Jack: Yes, I know, but I didn't ask if you were happy. I asked you how you were getting on.

Broxopp: This is the life I like, my boy. It's harder than it was when I first began, but I made good once and I can do it again. (*Thumping the table.*) I like doing it.

Jack: Yes, but you still haven't told me how you are getting on.

Broxopp: Don't you worry about *me*. I'll make my fortune again long before you make yours with painting.

Jack: Yes, you might well do that. (*After a pause.*) Look here, you gave me £350 a year out of the wreck. What did you keep for yourself and Mother?

Broxopp: Really, Jack, I refuse to be cross-examined like this.

Jack: It's no good refusing, because I shall simply ask Mother.

Broxopp: (*Smiling to himself.*) All right, ask her.

Jack: (*Looking at him with sudden suspicion.*) You wicked old villain, you've been deceiving her, too. (*Sternly.*) Did you leave anything for yourself at all?

Broxopp: Of course I did. Look here, boy, it may be difficult for you to believe, but there was a time when your father's name was in everybody's mouth.

Jack: His beans were, anyway. But for Heaven's sake don't rub it in that I made you change your name, and lost your business for you. I know all that; I'm here to apologise.

Broxopp: I'm not referring to that at all. All I want you to understand is that if I made a name and a fortune before, I can do it again. That's the sort of man I am. It's quite different with *you*. You never had any education. I started learning at eight years old; you didn't start till you were twenty-five. It's hard luck on you having only £350 a year now, but perhaps you'll be able to do something with your painting before long. Only don't worry about *me*.

Jack: Dad, you're a gentleman, you really are. Then

you've forgiven my blessed father-in-law for playing the fool with your money?

Broxopp: That is *not* the way to speak of Sir Roger. Sir Roger Tenterden does not "play the fool" with money. With the utmost courtesy he condescends to lose it for you.

Jack: Yes, but all the same, I think you ought to have taken a hand when you saw how things were going.

Broxopp: (*Looking mysteriously round the room to see that they are alone.*) Jack, never let anybody know, but it was really your mother's doing. I think she was a little afraid of Sir Roger, a little over-awed by him. There were many occasions when I was on the point of interfering, but your mother always seemed quite satisfied with the way things were going. She seemed to trust Sir Roger, and—well, I gave way to her. For once her judgment was wrong. But of course I let her think that I alone am responsible.

Jack: I see . . .But you're quite happy now?

Broxopp: Happy? My boy, it's life!

Jack: Happier than you were at the Manor House?

Broxopp: A hundred times!

Jack: Yes. (*He rises and says solemnly.*) Dad, I promise never to let mother know that *she* is responsible for this.

Broxopp: (*Taking it quite seriously.*) That's right, my boy.

Jack: (*Laughing.*) Oh, Dad, you're priceless. (*More gravely.*) So is mother . . .

(*Nancy and Iris come in.*)

Iris: Hullo, Daddy Broxopp.

Broxopp: (*Kissing her.*) Hullo, my girl. You haven't called me that for a long time.

Iris: I know. Let's try and forget that. Are you going to forgive me? She has.

Broxopp: Forgive you for what?

Iris: Well, for not having been an orphan—for one thing.

Nancy: (*Shaking her head at her with a smile.*) Iris!

Iris: And for putting a lot of nonsense into Jack's head, and making an utter mess of things.

Jack: My dear girl, any nonsense in my head came there of itself, it wasn't put in by you.

Iris: Well, there it was, anyhow. The fact is, Daddy Broxopp, we've made a discovery in the last few months.

Broxopp: Hallo, what's that?

Iris: Well, it's rather important. Are you ready, Jack? (*Taking Jack's hand.*) We have discovered——

Jack: Once, finally and for all——

Iris: That Jack Chillingham——

Jack: *Né* Broxopp——

Iris: Cannot paint.

Jack: He cannot paint.

Jack and Iris Together: He cannot cannot paint.

Nancy: Oh, Jack, what a disappointment for you.

Broxopp: How did you discover it, boy?

Jack: By regarding my latest masterpiece in a dispassionate light. You ought to have seen it, Dad. It was called "The First Meeting of Henry V. with Katherine of France."

Iris: I sat for Katherine.

Jack: She also stood for Henry V. I wish you had seen her as Henry V; it would have been a surprise for you.

Iris: I was jolly good.

Jack: It was going to be my Academy picture. That was why I chose that subject. It was the stodgiest subject I could think of. Unfortunately, when I had finished it, I regarded it in a dispassionate light and—(*frankly.*) it was rotten.

Iris: Very rotten.

Jack: Very, very rotten.

Nancy: Oh, poor Jack! I understand how you must have felt.

Jack: Well then, we put our heads together.

Iris: (*Leaning her head against his.*) Like this.

Jack: And decided that we were taking your money under false pretences.

Iris: Because you see he cannot paint.

Jack: He cannot paint.

Jack and Iris Together: He cannot cannot paint.

Broxopp: Well, what are you going to do, then?

Iris: (*Surprised.*) Give you back your money, of course.

Broxopp: Don't be silly. I didn't mean that. What work are you going to do?

Jack: (*Wandering round the room.*) Well, that's rather the question. Iris thought—(*He stops suddenly at the sight of his mother's drawing.*) Oh Lord, here's this again. What on earth——?

Broxopp: (*Off-handedly.*) Just a rough sketch for an advertisement—a little idea of mine—Ajax defying the lightning—Your mother was—Well then, Jack, you——

Jack: (*Looking up at his mother reproachfully.*) Mother, darling!

Nancy: Oh, Jack, Ajaxes are so hard.

Jack: (*Sitting down and picking up the pencil.*) Oh, but—Iris, you'll have to stand for Ajax. Imagine Dad's the lightning and defy him like the dickens. (*Begining to draw.*) Right foot out a bit more. Hands behind the back, I think. Keep the head well up—as though you thought nothing of him.

Iris: Daddy Broxopp, I defy you. (*She gives a hurried glance at Jack to make sure he is not looking, blows a hasty kiss to Broxopp, and hastily resumes her defiant attitude. Nancy is looking over Jack's shoulder.*)

Jack: (*Drawing.*) You'd find yourself much safer with a model, Mother, even for a rough sketch. You get so much more life into it.

Nancy: Oh, Jack, I wish I could draw like that.

Iris: He isn't bad, is he?

Jack: (*Still at it.*) Keep your head up . . . I can't draw—but when I say I can't draw, I don't mean the same as when I say I can't paint. You see—Listen!

(*A loud knocking is heard at the outer door.*)

Iris: (*Nodding her head at Broxopp.*) That's you, Daddy Broxopp. You did the lightning so well that you've brought on the thunder.

Nancy: Oh, I'd better go. The maid's out.

Jack: (*Getting up.*) No, you don't; I'll go. It's Dad's lady friend—I'll bet you what you like—come to see his tie. Perhaps I can buy her off on the mat.

Nancy: (*Shaking her head at him.*) Jack!

(*Jack goes out.*)

Iris: (*Relaxing.*) Well, I suppose he won't want Ajax any more. (*She goes over to look at the sketch.*) Doesn't he draw nicely? (*To Broxopp.*) That squiggly bit is you. (*Looking from one to the other.*) No, I shouldn't recognise you.

Broxopp: (*Picking up the sketch.*) Yes, that's the way to draw. (*To Nancy.*) All the same, darling, I shall never forget the way you drew those suspenders in the old days. There was something about them——

(*Jack and Miss Johns come in.*)

Jack: (*Protesting as he comes in.*) Oh, but I assure you I remember you perfectly. Mother, this is Miss Johns. You remember her, don't you? She was—er—in the old days—don't you remember——?

Nancy: (*Holding out her hand.*) How do you do, Miss Johns? It's very nice of you to come and see us now. (*Hopefully to Broxopp.*) Jim, you remember Miss Johns?

Broxopp: (*The only one who does, and he can't place her for the moment.*) Delighted to see you again, Miss Johns. Of course, I remember you perfectly. (*He looks at her with a puzzled expression.*)

Miss Johns: It's very good of you to remember me, Mr. Broxopp—I mean Chillingham. I can hardly expect you to. I only just came because I'm your neighbour, and—(*looking round her awkwardly.*)—but perhaps you'd rather I——

Broxopp: Oh, not at all. You know Jack's wife, don't you? (*They bow to each other.*) Sit down and tell us what you have been doing lately.

(*She sits down. Jack wanders back to his sketch and Iris goes with him, looking over his shoulder as he touches it up.*)

Miss Johns: You know, I don't believe you do remember me, Mr. Broxopp—I beg your pardon, I mean Mr. Chillingham.

Broxopp: (*Grimly.*) I don't, but I'm going to. (*He looks at her with a frown.*)

Nancy: (*Kindly, as Miss Johns is obviously get-*

ting uncomfortable under Broxopp's gaze.) Darling one——

Broxopp: Wait! (*Thumping his hand with his fist.*) I've got it! (*Pointing to her.*) You interviewed me on that day—of course, I remember you now.

Miss Johns: Oh, Mr. Brox—Oh, how wonderful of you to remember when you must have been interviewed so often.

Broxopp: Yes, but you were the last person to interview the Great Broxopp. You heard that I had changed my name?

Miss Johns: Oh, I was so sorry! I heard about it all, and how you——

Broxopp: Oh well, you mustn't pity us too much. We're quite happy here, aren't we, Nancy?

Nancy: This is where we began, you know.

Broxopp: Why of course she knows. I remember your saying that you lived on the floor below. And are you still on the same paper?

Miss Johns: Yes, but—er—(*She is obviously uncomfortable.*)

Broxopp: But they don't want an interview with The Great Chillingham. (*With utter confidence.*) They will, Miss Johns, they will.

Miss Johns: (*Enthusiastically.*) Oh, I'm sure they will.

Broxopp: (*Suddenly.*) How's your brother?

Miss Johns: (*Very much flattered.*) Oh, do you remember him? How wonderful you are!

Broxopp: (*Struggling with his memories.*) Yes—I remember—I—(*He stands up triumphant.*) I've got it! Chillingham's Cheese for Chickens!

Jack: Hullo! Dad's off.

Iris: Go it, Daddy Broxopp.

Nancy: S'sh, dear.

Broxopp: That Chicken Food—it's not on the market yet?

Miss Johns: No. Oh, do you really think——

Broxopp: Your brother still believes in it? Well, that doesn't matter. He'll believe in it when *I* take it up. Can you get your brother up to London?

Miss Johns: (*Overwhelmed.*) Yes, I think——

Broxopp: (*Overwhelming her still more completely.*) Can you get him up at once? This evening? Send him a telegram now—Don't be afraid of a long one—I'm paying for it. (*Taking out half-a-crown.*) Here you are—That's a good girl. (*Hurrying her to the door.*) *Off you go!* Remember, I've got to see him tonight. Got that? Good.

(*Miss Johns goes out still overwhelmed.*)

Jack: I say, Dad, you needn't go bustling the poor girl out like that. I could have gone.

Broxopp: (*In command.*) No, you couldn't. I want you. Now then, Jack, you were offering just now to give me back that money. I won't take it. But we shall want all the capital we can get for this. Will you come into partnership?

Jack: By Jove, rather. I don't know what it's all about, but I'm with you.

Broxopp: (*To Jack.*) All right. Sit down. Draw a hen. Wait! Have you got any ideas about Art for Art's sake?

Jack: (*Drawing.*) You wouldn't ask that if you'd seen my Academy picture.

Broxopp: Good! A hen sitting on an enormous egg.

Iris: (*Looking over Jack.*) Doesn't my husband draw nicely? He's in work again now. Employed regular.

Nancy: (*Sadly.*) I can't think how you do it, dear.

Broxopp: Above—"Chillingham's Cheese for Chickens." Underneath—"Makes Hens Lay."

Jack: Why cheese?

Broxopp: Why not?

Jack: True.

Broxopp: Makes Hens Lay.

Iris: (*Looking up.*) You're sure it does make hens lay? I thought chicken food only made chickens grow.

Broxopp: (*With the grim determination that made the Beans.*) If I say that it makes them lay, it makes them lay.

Jack: That's right, Dad. Don't you stand any nonsense from a Buff Orpington.

Broxopp: It's a question of faith, Iris. If the hen knows you have faith in her, she'll respond. (*Ecstatically to himself.*) Makes hens lay. I see a poultry farm in every back garden. I see eggs on every breakfast table. Chillingham eggs.

Jack: Chillingham and bacon for breakfast—hooray!

Broxopp: Jack, as soon as I get my office fixed up, you will be kept busy drawing posters. I've got plenty of ideas for you. Iris, will you take a job as clerk? No salary, but we'll give you shares.

Jack: Jump at it, darling.

Iris: Done, Daddy Broxopp.

Broxopp: (*Ecstatically.*) Nancy, there's work—hard work in front of us. Are you ready for it?

Nancy: (*Modestly.*) You've got Jack and Iris to help you now. You don't want *me.*

Broxopp: Ah, but I must have you. You must always be holding my hand.

Nancy: (*Tenderly as she takes his hand.*) There's never been more than one Broxopp Baby.

Broxopp: (*With dignity.*) Madam, you see before you The *Great* Broxopp—(*Looking down at Jack.*) No, not the Great Broxopp. Chillingham—and Son.

EAST CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY
A0001601208646
04 12 88